DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 102 SO 015 036

TITLE	A Common World: Courses in Women's Studies for Rural and Urban Communities.
INSTITUTION	Worthington City School District, OH.
SPONS AGENCY	Women's Educational Equity Act Program (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	82
NOTE	255p.
AVAILABLE FROM	WEEA Publishing Center, Education Development Center, 55 Chapel St., Newton, MA 02160 ($9.00).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Collected Works - General (020)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Education; *Community Education; Course Descriptions; Employed Women; Females; Health; Latin American Culture; Latin Americans; Learning Activities; Oral History; Parenthood Education; Parent Materials; Postsecondary Education; Resource Materials; *Rural Areas; *Urban Areas; *Womens Studies; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Developed and taught during 1979 by facilitators working with groups of community women in central Vermont and in metropolitan Boston, these courses are intended to promote the visibility of women's accomplishments, to enhance women's personal growth, and to increase females' analytic skills in a political context. Each of the nine chapters in the book addresses a topic of importance to women--to rural women in Part I and to urban women in part II--and suggests learning activities. Resources used in the courses are also cited. The courses for rural women discuss work outside the home, health care, parenting, and oral history as a technique for investigating the many contributions made by women. The topics treated in the courses for urban women include black women's culture, the role that oral history and oral tradition play in women's history, the relationship between women's role in society and women's lack of control over their health care, the problems of the Latin people and the devaluation of Latin culture in this country, and ways for women to explore the process of writing. Learning activities involve women in reading and discussing books and journal articles, analyzing films, keeping journals, doing oral history projects, and engaging in group discussions. (RM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED235102

A COMMON WORLD:

Courses in Women's Studies for Rural and Urban Communities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Millie
LeBlanc
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Developed by
WOMEN'S COMMUNITY STUDIES

Goddard College
Goddard-Cambridge Graduate Program
Plainfield, Vermont

SO 015 036

Women's Educational Equity Act Program
U.S. Department of Education
T. H. Bell, Secretary

Discrimination Prohibited: No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance, or be so treated on the basis of sex under most education programs or activities receiving Federal assistance.

The activity which is the subject of this report was produced under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, under the auspices of the Women's Educational Equity Act. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Printed and distributed by WEEA Publishing Center, 1982
Education Development Center, Inc., 55 Chapel Street
Newton, Massachusetts 02160

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In a collective effort such as this one, there are many people to thank. We especially wish to thank the women who participated in these workshops.

There are also many others who contributed to this program. We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of the women who supported our work, as members of our board and as community site staff, throughout the year. We benefited greatly from the assistance of several staff members of Goddard College. There are many others whose general support and encouragement were valuable. Our friends, our families, and general readers offered continual support, as well as helpful comments and criticisms.

We are grateful to several people who contributed to the completion of our book: Roberta H. Winston, Copy Editor; Prudence Fisher Burns, Rachel Burger, and Brenda L. Haywood, Illustrators; Deborah Alford and Elizabeth Bouché, Typists/Administrative Assistants; and Northlight Studio Press.

We want to thank the Women's Program staff of the U.S. Department of Education for providing the funding that enabled us to put our ideas into practice.

Lastly, we want to express our gratitude to the women of the contemporary feminist movement, whose efforts have contributed to the struggle for women's equity.

COOPERATIVE CANNERY
1979
MAPLE SYRUP
COOPER CANNER
COOPER CANNER
COOPER CANNER
COOPER CANNER
CORN
COO CAN

CONTENTS

Introduction vii
Karen Lane and Deborah Pearlman

Part I: Courses in Women's Studies for Rural Communities

1. Women and Work 3
Marna Chater
2. Women and Health 37
Catherine Gates
3. Parenting: Issues in Women's Lives 53
Sue Hooper
4. Oral History as a Group Process 73
Christina Johnston

Part II: Courses in Women's Studies for Urban Communities

5. Black Women's Culture 105
Lorraine Bethel
6. Women's History, Oral Tradition, and Culture 131
Chris Czernik
7. Women and Health Care: Issues and Alternatives 171
Madge Kaplan
8. Latin Women in the United States 213
Natalia Muiña
9. Women and Writing 229
Fahamisha Shariat

Comments and Criticisms 243

6

Rachel Burger

INTRODUCTION

Karen Lane and Deborah Pearlman

This course guide in women's studies is designed to meet the needs and interests of women in rural and urban communities. These courses, in the form of workshop series, were developed and taught during 1979 by facilitators working with groups of community women in central Vermont and in metropolitan Boston. Part I, for rural women, contains chapters on work, health, parenting, and oral history. Part II, for urban women, contains chapters on Black women's culture, women's history, women and health care, Latin women's culture, and women and writing. Each of these courses provides opportunities for the members of the participating group to share their individual experiences as women and to explore women's roles in society.

Over the past decade, the women's movement has generated a growing number of programs and activities designed to counteract the negative effect of sex discrimination in many areas, including law, education, and employment. As the focus of these activities has broadened, so, too, has the number of women whose lives have been touched by this movement increased. Many women have come to recognize some of the urgent problems they face today: the need for equal access to education and job training, for equal employment opportunities and benefits, for reproductive choice, for better child care facilities, and for a broader range of options for older women. What is presented in this course guide is the written record of an educational program having its roots in the women's movement. The purpose has been to reach out to women affected by discrimination, lack of formal education and stable employment, and limited time and opportunity for examining social and personal issues in depth.

Karen Lane *served as rural coordinator for the Women's Community Studies Program. Since 1970, she has been involved in community education programs, including an experimental one for rural women and children in north Georgia, as well as programs in folklore, oral history, and ethnic studies. She has a long-standing commitment to the achievement of equal rights for minorities and women.*

Deborah Pearlman *served as project coordinator for the Women's Community Studies Program. Active in the women's movement for five years, she views her commitment to women's issues as an integral part of her work in education and counseling. She is a contributor to the book* Breaking the Silence: Seven Courses in Women's Studies, *and is co-founder of a distribution network of independent curriculum and media developers in women's studies.*

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

In the development, teaching, and writing of this course guide, a new understanding of the concepts of community, and of education, illustrated the important relationship between theory and practice.

The women who participated came from the community. The women involved—group leaders and participants alike—all came from the local community. The groups were drawn from many sources: from social service agencies serving low-income women, from other voluntary institutions and programs such as senior citizens' organizations and parents' groups, from schools, from non-voluntary institutions such as prisons and halfway houses, and from ad hoc groups assembled through ads and through notices posted on community bulletin boards. Each of the women who presented the workshops had previous experience in off-campus learning; each had a special sensitivity to low-income women; and each was attuned, in making outreach efforts, to the importance of taking the time to know those who live and work in the community.

No matter how important the need for change, creating a situation in which to effect change does not necessarily ensure that it will take place or be accepted. To make the courses as physically accessible as possible, meetings were held in the communities from which women came: in private homes, church basements, and libraries; at meal sites for the elderly and in nursing homes; at community centers; and within existing programs at schools and agencies. To make communication as open and comfortable as possible, women were encouraged simply to share their own needs and concerns with the group. It is likely that the presentation of an outspoken feminist point of view at the outset would have made participants feel uncomfortable or intimidated by a philosophy not their own. Instead, the focus was on what is common to many women in this society: the loneliness encountered by older women; the isolation and self-doubt faced by mothers of young children; concerns about health; the reality of women's double day, working at home and on the job; the fear of violence against women. Beginning with experiences of immediate relevance, the groups moved from the specific to the general, from sharing and recording events to analyzing them.

A new sense of community was created within the group. When women gather to discuss their experiences, they make connections which demonstrate that women's needs, interests, and problems are shared. A recognition of this common bond helps women be open about their anxieties and frustrations and about their need for equal respect and opportunities. As participants moved from the particular to the general, from seeing themselves as individuals to seeing themselves as part of a larger entity, meetings among groups of women were transformed into women's groups. Initially, some women disputed the value of such an environment; however, after experiencing it, they responded with affirmation. Women find in the group experience an opportunity to see themselves separately from men, to see those attributes not usually valued or fostered come into their own, to see their own worth, to gain some confidence, and to try new behaviors, including leadership, organizing, and other skills.

As women gain pride in newly acquired skills, it is important to retain a respect for traditional values and ways of thinking. Although it is natural to feel torn between familiar cultural and religious beliefs and an allegiance to new people and new ideas, membership in a religious, ethnic, or racial group need not preclude an alliance with other women. The sense of community which can be created with women different from one's self overlaps the more familiar groupings of family, church, and neighborhood.

By providing the groups with privacy, confidentiality, and time away from pressures and problems, these workshops help create a new sense of community during a short span of hours. Information about women's lives is drawn from many sources—life histories, diaries, photographs, and personal experiences—all legitimate avenues for gathering knowledge by and about women. Input from written and audiovisual materials and from guest speakers broadens the scope of contemporary and historical issues. Explicit in building trust is the belief that each woman has something worthwhile to say and that out of this experience comes a better understanding of the issues women face, not only as individuals, but as women in this society. Active involvement in the creation of a product (such as the examples described in the oral history and the writing workshop series) can be important in underscoring the process of moving from the personal to the political. This group learning environment may enable participants to see that individual problems often require collective solutions.

The women saw new possibilities for community in the future. These chapters describe the specific experiences of nine facilitators and the women with whom they worked. As a document, this course guide translates those experiences in a way that may enable women in other places to form their own sense of community as they participate in these workshops. Offered here are tools for education, not "answers." Most important is the opportunity for community women to share with one another and to recognize the bond between them.

The recognition of this bond can be the basis for social action. Participation in women's studies courses such as these can bring about a new self-awareness for the individual women who participate. The experience of meeting and sharing can also help the group to see a need for change in the social structures of the community.

THE CONCEPT OF FEMINIST EDUCATION

Just as "community" is invested here with a new sense of meaning, so, too, does the learning process described in these pages give new meaning to the word "education." Combining humanistic, person-centered education with a particular focus on women has yielded a feminist model of education. Feminist education as described here begins with the experiences and feelings each woman has to tell. From these expressions emerges the subject matter of the courses. From an active involvement in discussions and activities and an exposure to source materials come an understanding and analysis of women's day-to-day lives. The continual exchange between the individual learner and the other group members, between the information contributed by the members of the group and that derived from other resources, creates a feminist educational experience, one in which there is a constant striving for women's empowerment and self-determination.

This model of learning is distinctly different from instruction that traditionally takes place within groups. In traditional teaching the group is most often used to create an atmosphere of competition in which individuals demonstrate that they are more knowledgeable and skilled than other group members. Feminist education, on the other hand, fosters collaborative effort among women. It strives for that unexpected but welcome moment when one woman says to another, "Ah, you too! I thought it was only me!" Such moments of recognition and insight were to happen many times. They demonstrate some of the themes that unite the participants across many miles: motherhood; widowhood; the need for better health care, job training, and child care; isolation; and discrimination. Many of these moments enable participants to find new reasons to cherish women's common history, to value themselves and gain inspiration from others, to cope with a world

10

that does not value women equally with men, to gain power to accomplish their goals, and to find nourishment in their own achievements.

Beginnings and endings are difficult to define. In this program, change began to take place when women examined the issues closest to their lives: parenting, household work, health, sexuality, depression, and employment. Perhaps without becoming involved in social change through active participation in the women's movement, the women who joined in these workshops have seen the value of making changes both within the family and beyond.

Because the majority of American women work of necessity and not by choice, and because many will be single heads of households during some part of their adult life, courses such as those described here substantiate the need for changing the inequities of the present socioeconomic system. They also demonstrate the need for a deeper understanding of the interrelationship between women's personal lives and the economic and social realities that govern them. Creating new understanding, building new communities of women, can contribute to making theoretical and practical connections for change.

USING THIS COURSE GUIDE

The goals of each of the workshop series are to promote the visibility of women's accomplishments, to enhance women's personal growth, and to increase participants' analytic skills in a political context. The nine chapters in this book each address a topic of importance to women—to rural women in Part I, to urban women in Part II—and offer special insights and suggested activities that will be helpful to the potential user.

Resources are listed at the end of each chapter and provide facilitators with essential preparation for conveying information on a topic and for having an overview of the subject matter. The reader is strongly urged to familiarize herself with these resources before beginning to teach any of the courses described here. Examining these lists of books, pamphlets, articles, films, and other educational media, at the outset, may save a group leader time, energy, and expense.

Each of the courses described here will be shaped by the teacher who implements it, by the participants who are involved, and by the setting in which the course takes place. Because each author's work reflects her own unique style of teaching, the reader is encouraged to examine all of these chapters before beginning a workshop. In this way, she will become familiar with a variety of approaches and materials. Because individuals also learn in different ways, helping to shape the content of the course, it becomes a reflection of both the participants and the group leader. The user may find the most effective course to be a synthesis of all these chapters.

Below is a general description of the chapters, highlighting the content and style of each. Differences in organization will be apparent to the reader, and reflect the individual approach taken by each author. In several chapters, subheadings emphasize certain points and guide the reader through the pages. Chapter 4, "Oral History as a Group Process," however, has no such subheadings. This is because a special emphasis has been placed on the concept of *process:* both the learning process described in the chapter and the communication process between author and reader. The reader will most clearly understand what the author has to say if this chapter, along with the other chapters, is read in its entirety.

Part I: Courses in Women's Studies for Rural Communities

- Chapter 1, "Women and Work," has as its focus paid work outside the home. The emphasis is on recognizing women's economic contributions, valuing women's economic independence and self-reliance, and enhancing the self-worth of the participants. Topics include a historical overview of women's work, the value of work, work at home and on the job, job hunting, non-traditional jobs, and economics. Curriculum units are outlined in chart form, and these are cross-referenced with the list of resources at the conclusion of the chapter.
- Chapter 2, "Women and Health," is designed to help develop in each participant the sense that she is a person capable of assuming responsibility for her health care and able to use the available health care system to her greatest benefit. Because women usually provide family health care in the home, this course enhances and expands upon women's existing knowledge, and it addresses such topics as depression, contraception, vaginitis, the politics of women's health, emergencies, family self-help, smoking, nutrition, exercise, menstruation and menopause, and sexuality.
- Chapter 3, "Parenting: Issues in Women's Lives," examines many issues faced by mothers, especially mothers of young children. The chapter treats parenting not as an isolated role, but as a role that has a profound impact on women's emotional, economic, and social situations as well. Journal keeping and many group activities are introduced as effective means of approaching issues such as communication, family roles, assertiveness, and personal growth.
- Chapter 4, "Oral History as a Group Process," introduces a highly rewarding activity through which to celebrate women's essential contributions to life—contributions unheralded by traditional written history. The emphasis is on the fact that each woman is a valuable resource, not only for herself, but for others, and that participation in the oral history process fosters communication, sharing, and support among women. At the conclusion of the chapter is a sample oral history transcript.

Part II: Courses in Women's Studies for Urban Communities

- Chapter 5, "Black Women's Culture," confronts the fact that Black women are doubly oppressed as women and as Black people. Black women's membership in these two groups gives them the least access to economic privilege and political power. Black feminism treats the lives of Black women seriously and struggles for a world in which being Black and female no longer means being stereotyped into predefined roles. The sessions encompass discussions, activities, and resources on Black women's culture; culinary arts; style and aesthetics, including fashion, hair, and mannerisms; visual and decorative arts; and music—all of which celebrate Black women's creativity and survival.
- Chapter 6, "Women's History, Oral Tradition, and Culture," introduces the reader to an exciting way of understanding events, conditions, and human interactions from one time period to another. It is history that is multiracial and multi-ethnic, and it reflects various economic backgrounds. The role that oral history and oral tradition play in women's history is significant: because the history of women and other neglected groups is so rarely recorded, oral history represents an important primary source. This chapter provides extensive activities and resources on the richness and complexity of women's history and oral tradition, and it offers suggestions for doing individual and group oral histories.
- Chapter 7, "Women and Health Care: Issues and Alternatives," examines the relationship between women's role in society and women's lack of

access to control over their health care. Two curricula—Workshop A for adults and Workshop B for adolescents—provide exciting activities and extensive resources about the politics of health care and preventive health care; a special sensitivity is given to issues of sexuality, homosexuality, race, and culture. The workshops emphasize the value of reconnecting women to knowledge that was once a familiar part of the culture and folklore, and to skills that ensure that women's health needs will be better met.

- Chapter 8, "Latin Women in the United States," describes the problems of Latin people and the devaluation of Latin culture in this country. The problems facing Latin women are enormous, and the impetus for creating change must come from within, not outside, the Latin community. This workshop series begins a dialogue to end the invisibility and silence of Latin women. Sessions include information on the Latin woman's cultural roots, morals, and values; on the economic realities and kinds of discrimination she faces; on health care and preventive medicine; and on the potential for social change.
- Chapter 9, "Women and Writing," challenges the premise that writing is something only a special few can do, and reading something that requires extensive training. These popular attitudes reinforce class distinctions and racial stereotypes. The emphasis in this workshop series is on finding ways to explore the process of writing by women—particularly by Black women. Sessions include insightful discussions, and examples, for moving from self-discovery to self-expression to self-revelation. The value and use of the journal, as well as unpublished manuscripts by women writers, broaden the discovery of women's achievements.

A NOTE ON SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

In addition to the lists of resources accompanying each chapter in this course guide, the following materials are especially recommended to the user seeking general supplementary resources.

Supplementary Resources: For those readers preferring short introductory workshops in women's studies, an excellent course guide is available for women whose access to education and employment has been limited because of race, class, or sex discrimination. *Breaking the Silence: Seven Courses in Women's Studies* (Newton, Massachusetts: Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center, 1979) includes a user's guide and courses on "Black Women Writers," "Introduction to Women's History in the United States," "Reading and Writing about Women's Lives," "Sex Roles and Socialization," "Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective," "Women in Prison," and "Women and Their Working Lives." Each workshop is primarily experiential in nature and uses consciousness raising, skill building, and resource sharing. Extensive bibliographies and suggestions for audiovisual and supplementary readings are included.

Very useful and valuable complements to both *Breaking the Silence* and *A Common World* have been developed by independent media artists. *Being a Woman and Everything,* produced by Carol Frenier, is a fifteen-minute color film available on videocassette and tape. It portrays a warm and engaging role model of a working-class woman from childhood through adulthood. Information on the film and its accompanying teacher's guide can be obtained by writing to the producer (Box 111, Manchester, Massachusetts 01944). *And Ain't I a Woman: A History of Women in the United States from 1600 to the Present* is a concise (fifteen-minute) overview of United States history in slide/tape format. The show depicts the day-to-day reality of women who worked long hours in factories and fields—work that required strength and endurance—and who returned home to a second job of child care and household work. Supplementary readings and sources on women's history are included in a teacher's guide, which contains a script of the show, a dateline on United States women's history, a bibliography for students and teachers, suggested classroom activities, and a list of themes and issues helpful in the study of United States history. Information on purchase or rental can be obtained by writing the producers (Ain't I a Woman, P.O. Box 730, Boston, Massachusetts 02102).

A FINAL NOTE

Women are experiencing a revolution. The support of other women is providing a catalyst for women to look within themselves. For some women this is an exciting prospect. For other women this may seem difficult or appear unnecessary. Yet unless women have the opportunity to make choices, there is no possibility for making changes. *A Common World* offers a place for beginning. The chapters in this book represent a work in progress. Each workshop series can be expanded upon and modified as facilitators and group members deem necessary. For example, courses can be led by one person, or team-taught, as "Black Women's Culture" and "Women and Writing" were. After using some or all of the materials in the course guide, please fill out and return the form provided at the end of this book. Readers' and users' comments and criticisms will be most welcome.

Part I: Courses in Women's Studies for Rural Communities

1. WOMEN AND WORK

Marna Chater

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this curriculum is on paid work outside the home. It does not include consideration of one very important issue, work done in the home. That particular issue is beyond the scope of this curriculum. The purpose here is to offer support to individual women in their employment.

The women addressed in this curriculum live and work in the small towns and remote areas of our country, where the pace of change is slow and the culture resistant to unfamiliar ideas. Rural women, who have spent their childhood and adult years in small, isolated communities, have not had access to college courses, women's consciousness-raising groups, and other such opportunities. The material presented here has been designed with that consideration in mind.

Many women, particularly in rural America, have grown up with the assumption that their primary work lies with their home and family. For these women, the cultural "ideal" would have them remain in the home. They grow up expecting their spouse to be the breadwinner, while they are supported, protected and cared for as a dependent. For many women these traditional expectations concerning their roles are in conflict with their day-to-day reality.

The times have changed, the traditions have been broken, yet people hold to the "ideal." In many ways, the traditional values present something people know and trust. But the change in reality must be perceived. For example, two-fifths of all workers in the labor force in 1978 were women. Fifty-nine percent of all women eighteen to sixty-four—the usual working ages—were working. When viewed in comparison to other times, the contemporary situation becomes more dramatic. The number of working mothers has increased more than tenfold since the period immediately preceding World War II, while the number of working women has more than tripled.[31]

Society's assumption that the primary role of women is in the home results in unequal opportunities for women in education and employment. The brunt of this inequality is acutely experienced by women who become the primary wage earners in their families—single parents, displaced homemakers, and welfare mothers.

Marna Chater *has worked as a consultant to health, education, and human services organizations in Vermont for the past fourteen years. Her work has been diverse and includes conducting a feasibility study for a women's health center, working in the criminal justice system, serving as training consultant to Planned Parenthood of Vermont in its formative years, and working with low-income groups. Currently, she is completing a series of humanities discussions in Vermont communities on the issues of crime and justice.*

(*Note:* In this chapter, superscript numerals refer to a particular reference, correspondingly numbered, in the Resources section, pp. 30–35.)

A majority of women are employed because of economic need. More than half of employed women are heads of households. More women than men are single parents and as such are often the sole support of their family. Many women expect to contribute to their family's support in more than a secondary way. In fact, a woman's income frequently raises her family out of poverty.[31]

GOALS

This curriculum is intended for use by potential leaders who have taught and worked with community groups. Experience and an intimate knowledge of the culture and women of the community can be most helpful. It is important to be aware of and sensitive to the values of the participants. The following is presented to serve as a guide to those teachers and group leaders who are working with community women in rural areas. My comments and suggestions in no way replace the teacher's own investigation of the issues concerning women and work. Each teacher needs to become familiar with the resources, ideas, and content of any given topic. What worked well for one person may not meet with the same success for another person because of unfamiliarity or discomfort with the topic or technique.

Three goals underlie the thinking behind this curriculum: (a) to recognize women's contributions, (b) to place greater value on economic independence and self-reliance, and (c) to enhance the self-worth of the participants. These goals are addressed from a feminist perspective, one which respects women and values them as equal to men, while challenging the absence of such equality.

The recognition of women's contributions can be a stimulus to a very basic shift of attitude toward women. Most often, the work done by women is devalued. Until recently, women's contributions have scarcely been documented. Consequently, for most women, the effect is both general and particular. Women tend to underrate the achievements of other women, and thus the individual also berates her own achievements. An effective way to counter this is to make known women's accomplishments. This acknowledgment enhances women's respect for other women and can have a powerful effect on women's own sense of self-respect and aspiration.

Equally important is placing value on women's economic independence and self-reliance. The women in my two groups were primarily single heads of households. Many women find that at some point in their lives they need to rely on themselves alone for financial support. Because of the cultural ideal that women should be dependent, many women resist economic independence. They fear that they will be viewed as a failure because they are not attached to a supporting male. It is helpful to challenge that view and recognize that economic independence for women is positive.

The concept of equal pay for equal work is readily supported by most men and women. Yet jobs that are traditionally held by women pay less than jobs requiring similar skills but traditionally held by men. Even in professions for which the training and skills are the same, the compensation is unequal. Equal access to economic power is essential for women. For most women, economic power comes from paid employment.

The third goal of the course is to enhance participants' recognition of their own self-worth. Because women's work and accomplishments have not received appropriate credit, many women internalize this view. The result is a lack of respect for themselves, which can be countered by the concrete methods offered in this curriculum. Indeed, the very opportunity to participate in a group of supportive women, who are experiencing, sharing, and learning from the same problems, will do much to enhance the self-image of the individual participants.

The purpose of this guide is to offer support to working women. In the practical and the concrete, as well as the philosophical, women need to readdress their relationship to work.

ORGANIZING THE GROUPS

"Women and Work" was taught at two sites. I was especially committed to working with our project's target population, whom we defined as rural Vermont women whose education and work experience had been limited.

The first site was the women's unit of a community correctional center. The women there were, for the most part, native Vermonters. Many of them had dropped out of high school, and some were completing their General Education Diploma (GED) for high school equivalency while incarcerated. The work experiences of these women were severely limited and limiting. Most often they had worked in factories, as chambermaids, as waitresses, or in nursing homes. Many of them had grown up on welfare or had turned to welfare for support during their adult life. The majority of their crimes had been motivated by economic need. Economic independence was especially significant for these women: to be released, they had to have a job and be able to support themselves.

The second group was selected with the help of two state employees, one a social worker with the Work Incentive Program (WIN) and the other a counselor with the Vermont Career Opportunities Program (VCOP). The participants selected were welfare clients returning to the job market. Most of them were working as secretaries or clerk trainees in state government. Many of them had dropped out of high school but had completed their GED, either on their own or as part of the WIN or VCOP programs. They had stayed home, raising families, and had been out of the job market from one to fifteen years. These women, too, were concerned about their economic independence.

The common denominator was economic need. Most women are incarcerated for economic crimes such as bad checks, petty larceny, welfare fraud, or stolen property. Their experience in the criminal justice system has been provoked by their own economic need. Indeed, poverty is often cited as a cause of crime. This seems dramatically true for women who are brought up with the expectation that they will be "cared for" but who find that in reality things are different.

The welfare system is no longer designed to fully support mothers until their children reach the age of majority. When her youngest child reaches school age, the welfare mother is expected to look for work. The WIN program, for example, provides support, assistance, and training for employment. The message is clear: the "State" does not expect to provide lifelong income for women.

ISSUES IN TEACHING

Both the sites and the women who participated in the course were distinctly different. My experience with each of them, as well as with the course material, has made certain issues foremost in structuring the curriculum. My concerns are on two levels—the philosophical and the practical. Let me begin with the philosophical, because I believe it provides depth and perspective to this curriculum. In this context I address three themes: (a) the feminist perspective, (b) the value of group sharing and participation, and (c) the value of role models. Often, practical matters enhance or interfere with the group's efforts. In my experience, certain elements make a considerable difference in working with groups. In this vein, three needs emerged while the course was underway: (a) the need for a supportive structure, (b) the need for private space, and (c) the need for appropriate materials for the group.

The Feminist Perspective

Our challenge in the Women's Community Studies project and in this curriculum has been to present our courses from a feminist perspective. A respect for women permeates this course and its preparation. This respect and value come from a feminist perspective. In my opinion, the feminist philosophy is one in which women and men are regarded as equals. Though this viewpoint seems simple enough, it is contradicted by other ideas that are common in our society. In most societies, women have had a less-than-equal role. Most women and men have accepted these terms as the way things are and probably ought to be. My purpose is to challenge that less-than-equal position and to urge that it be replaced with one of equality.

It is helpful to consider our society's view of women and to acknowledge the assumptions that society makes about women's roles. An understanding of the nature of these beliefs about women and the consequent role restrictions they impose is essential. *The History of Ideas on Women*[2] presents the major thinkers of Western civilization and their views on women, which range from extremely sexist to strongly egalitarian. I have included in the list of resources at the end of this chapter some collections of feminist viewpoints that I believe are very helpful.

My ultimate purpose here is to challenge the sex-role stereotypes that are so limiting for women. But first, while recognizing women's limitations in society, I believe that a posture of straining and stretching those limits enhances growth. Women need to recognize their own strengths and abilities in order to enhance and further them.

A feminist perspective on women and work contradicts the assumptions of society. Much of women's work and accomplishments has gone unrecognized; therefore, a commitment to acknowledge these contributions is essential. A number of books cited in the Resources section provide some of this information.

An underlying element of my beliefs and throughout the curriculum is a respect for women. This is probably the most vital aspect to convey in utilizing any of the course materials. A respect for women must permeate any presentation of the issues and topics.

A course that has a feminist perspective can be richly rewarding and challenging for the leader as well as for the participants. The process can also be painful, depressing, and anger provoking. As the group addresses the questions, issues, and readings, some assumptions about women, their roles, and their work will be challenged. For you, the leader, maintaining a critical consciousness will be helpful in approaching the material and issues. Your respect for women will help you to uncover the strengths that women often mask. Finally, remember your sense of humor—the ability to laugh at yourself, the situation, and even the inequities faced by women will help you to gain perspective and continue.

A critical examination of your own and the participants' attitudes about women and work is a start. The leader and participants might ask some questions like the following to gain a better focus and understanding:

- What ideas and expressions have influenced your attitudes about work since childhood? since adolescence? since adulthood? For example: *"Being a mother is a full-time job." "Women take jobs away from men." "A girl should get training or a career only as a back-up to her husband's full-time employment." "Men have careers but women have jobs."*
- Did you expect to "grow up and get married and live happily ever after" with no plans for work?
- Did you prepare for a career?
- What have been your own work experiences?
- What kinds of work are done by the women you know?
- How have these women influenced you?
- Did your mother or grandmothers work outside the home? Were you pleased, resentful, or respectful? How do you feel now?
- What value do you place on women's work at home?
- What kinds of work should women do?

Be especially sensitive to and aware of the conservative, traditional values that rural women may hold concerning their roles. Strong statements of radical values may be so foreign and far removed from the participants' experience that they serve to alienate the group.

The Value of Group Sharing and Participation

Teaching a group of women about women, encouraging them to share their own feelings and ideas, is very different from presenting "women" as a subject. The ideas and emphasis necessarily change when the participants are a part of the content. The sharing of experience, leadership, and power is important; it has an equalizing effect uniquely suited to a feminist model. Feminists who argue that women have been shortchanged by the authoritarian male model suggest a new model based on mutuality, sharing, and respect. This method of sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences helps to unite women in a way that leads to better self-understanding. By sharing, women learn that they are not alone. The pleasure of learning from others to trust oneself and one's feelings brings a new energy to the individual.

The group members' sharing of themselves is more valuable than any topic or resource. Again and again during course evaluation, I heard the participants' appreciation of one another:

> The parts that had the most impact and
> meaning for me were the discussions.
> I enjoyed the discussions and now realize
> that by working and being a mother and
> keeping house, I'm not alone.

The Value of Role Models

My experience with the two groups emphasized the value of role models. The leader, guest speakers, and participants themselves all serve as role models. What the leader demonstrates by her actions is often more powerful than what she says. She serves as a role model, and her expression of respect for the participants is thus communicated far more clearly than the course content. When you are looking for guest speakers, keep this in mind. Women who give and receive respect will have considerable impact on the group. Further, the participants themselves will demonstrate their own strengths and growth to one another and will serve as role models within the group.

Two examples of role models might illustrate their significance more clearly. When I first visited the correctional center, one woman was especially interested in the course. By the time the course actually began, six weeks later, she was on furlough status, had a job, and was living at home with her husband. In order to participate, she had to return to the center. She was interested, but did not attend the first two sessions. After considerable thought, she decided to participate, even though it meant returning to a locked institution and undergoing a strip search upon arrival and departure. The other inmates truly appreciated and respected her. They were eager to know how things were going for her on the outside. She was a great inspiration to them.

Because of that experience, I decided to expand upon the idea of role models with the second group. The two women, the WIN social worker and the VCOP counselor who recruited the group, also attended the sessions and participated in them. They are both strong and independent and are admired for their work in state government. The participants already knew these women and looked up to them as successful women workers.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

The Need for a Supportive Structure

I want to stress the need for support from an agency or institution when you attempt to work with a group of rural women. Transportation in rural areas can be a real problem. Having no public transportation and perhaps only limited access to cars can make just getting together very difficult. The availability of car pools and a transportation network can make the difference in many women's opportunity to participate. Reimbursing participants for the cost of transportation might also be necessary.

Many women involved in our course were the mothers of young children. However, I strongly recommend that women not care for their children during the meeting time. The sessions need to be a special time to pursue the course content. Children wanting their mother's attention certainly distract at least their mother and probably others. Making provisions for child care, in an adjacent or nearby but separate building, is the most appropriate solution.

The Need for Private Space

Because a primary concern for the group is the meeting space, privacy and comfort are important issues. If the participants are expected to share their ideas and feelings, the setting can do much to promote or detract from these goals. No one feels comfortable when she is interrupted or forced to share the meeting space. Some suggestions for private and comfortable places to meet might include a living room, an agency conference room, a meeting room in a town hall or library, a grange hall, or a recreation center. Any of these settings might work; each may have some drawbacks. For example, a living room might be comfortable, but not private enough. Or a conference/meeting room might be private, but too stiff, because of office furniture and prohibitions about smoking or drinking coffee. Every situation is different. In my experience, a closed door, a circle of participants, and hot water for tea and coffee provide the most conducive setting.

The course given at the prison illustrates the issues concerning privacy quite well. Any locked institution by its very nature denies privacy. Monitors, loudspeakers, doors being locked and unlocked, staff who come through checking—

all undermine intimacy. In institutions, the need for privacy takes on a special importance.

At the correctional facility, we met in the visiting room, which was the most private space available but which still subjected us to loudspeakers and the traffic of other residents (most often male) going to and from appointments with the public defenders, whose small and private office cubicles were contained within the visiting room.

The second group met in a room in the local library. For this group, having a neutral space was important. Although we could have met at an office or in an agency conference room, our time together would have been influenced by the location. Being free of the implications inherent in those settings was helpful.

Appropriate Materials for the Group

It is important to use materials appropriate for the participants—materials with which they can easily identify. Incarcerated women are more likely to identify with a film about women in prison than with an exercise on how to translate volunteer work experiences into the resume format. On the other hand, a group of women returning to the job market after twenty years' absence for child rearing will wonder what a film about welfare mothers has to say to them.

Because of my experience with the women at the correctional facility, I am especially aware of the wide discrepancy in reading abilities among adults. Early in the course, I brought reading materials that I thought would be helpful. However, I failed to recognize that the reading level of some participants would prevent them from reading and understanding the materials. Other techniques can address the same content in ways that will stimulate and involve the participants.

One especially productive session resulted from the use of appropriate materials with the second group. The topic was welfare mothers and work. I used two resources reflecting very different points of view. First was a slide-tape show, developed by a university economist, that discussed the question *Should Welfare Mothers Be Forced to Work?*[33] The economist's research had included interviews with 200 Vermont women; the economist had asked their opinions, taped their responses, and presented the results together with slides and comments. Second was the National Film Board of Canada's film *Would I Ever Like to Work,*[34] which expressed the frustrations of a welfare mother trying to survive. The discussion that followed was excellent. The women's messages to themselves and to one another were clear: they wanted to work, they wanted to be independent, and they wanted to support their families. In an effort to develop a broader consciousness about the welfare issue, we read and discussed Johnnie Tillmon's article "Welfare Is a Women's Issue."[17]

IMPACT AND SUMMARY

For me, the most important judgment about this course is its effect. I am especially concerned with having impact, with challenging and promoting change and growth. These courses have indeed had an impact. The women who participated appreciated most of all the opportunity to get together and discuss their concerns and their views. It was also rewarding to know of the individual changes the women made.

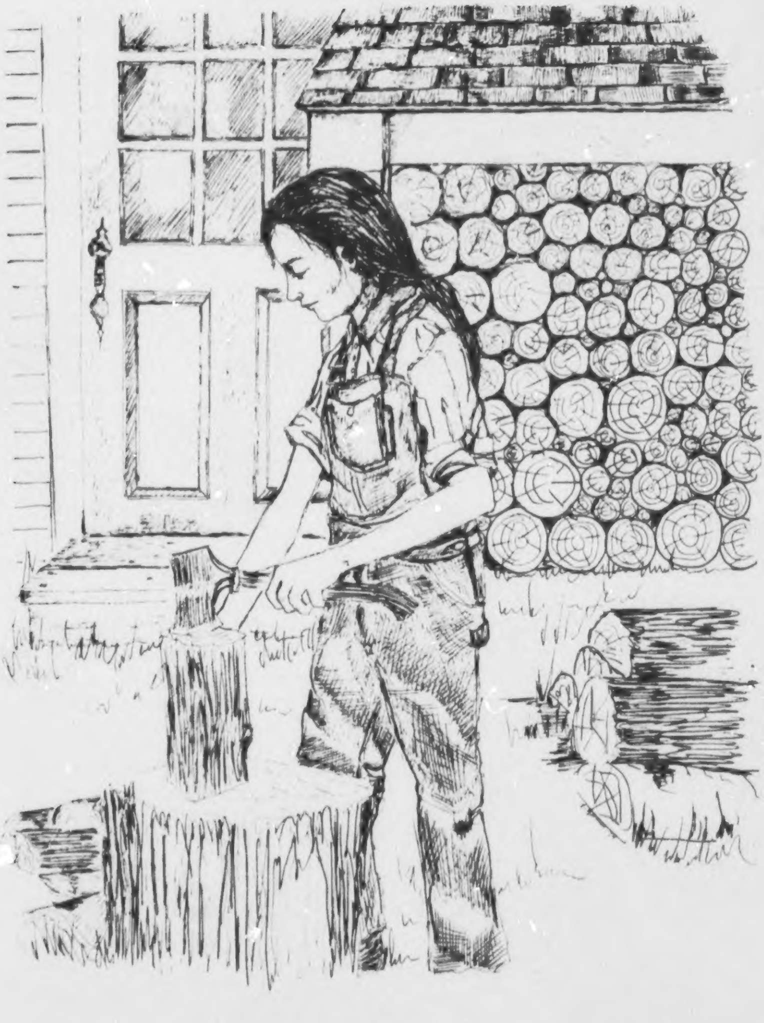
The correctional center staff shared with me their lack of appreciation for the course; the women did not go back to the unit docile. Indeed, sometimes the inmates were feisty, a quality that may not be appreciated by the staff and certainly could have some negative consequences for the inmates. On the other hand, as they began to feel stronger and better about themselves, they were more willing to challenge a system that has disabled them. Their response reflects the emergence of a more positive self-image.

The course's impact on the second group was both immediate and especially appropriate. During the course, three women secured permanent, full-time jobs. One person believes that she got the job directly as a result of her resume, which she prepared during the course. She said that when she arrived for the interview, she learned she was the only applicant who had prepared a resume. Her knowledge that she was well prepared made her feel in control of the situation. She was also confident since she had role played an interview situation during the course. The impact for her was dramatic—she got the job.

This project has provided me with a rewarding opportunity to appreciate the growth of the participants and the development of the group. I am passionately attached to the goals of this course. The project has also allowed me to expand my own knowledge and interest in the area of women and work. As a result, I have developed a new perspective on my strongly held beliefs about women's work, economic independence, and self-worth. For me, these have all been very important issues, but I have now come to a new appreciation of their feminist value.

The project gave me an opportunity to work with two remarkable groups of women. In preparing a study several years ago, I interviewed some women at the correctional center. I was depressed by their situation and felt strongly that they needed exposure to other ideas and to other women. The welfare mothers in the second group were working hard to improve their own difficult life situations; I admire their strengths and survival skills.

In summary, this experience has been very rewarding. I learned a great deal in searching for references and resources in the content area, I came to an understanding of my own appreciation for these issues, and I worked with two groups—watched them be challenged and change and grow. It has been exciting and valuable. I hope that this format has enabled me to share my concerns with the reader in a way that is helpful. The curriculum outline that follows gives specific suggestions, but consider them, reflect on your own experience, and blend what will work well in your own situation.



CURRICULUM

Theme and Issues: The section that follows is structured in the style of a traditional curriculum. I have developed eight key themes concerning women and work. The themes should not be considered inclusive or appropriate for all groups; rather, they attempt to clarify the essential issues.

This curriculum is intended to be flexible and easily adaptable for use by many groups. After briefly exploring the theme in a series of issue statements or questions, I present some optional approaches for the topic. My general framework includes *presentation* of suggested styles, such as guest speakers, films, or other outside resources; *activities* that focus on group interaction or result in a product; and *readings* on two levels—(a) for the participants and (b) as background information for the leader.

Presentation

Material or information can be presented by the leader, by a guest speaker, or by means of a film or slide show. It is often helpful in presenting information to reinforce the message. For example, a blackboard or notebook containing key words or phrases will serve to keep the group members focused on the issue at hand. Charts, figures, and graphs are helpful in explaining ideas. Some people need to hear new ideas, some need to see a visual explanation, and for many, the combination is especially effective; thus, films may be a useful tool.

Guest Speaker(s): Suggestions for the kind of speaker are listed when appropriate.

Film(s): Suggested films are listed when appropriate.

Activities

Activities are a good way to involve participants. If resumes are the concern, everyone might work on her own. For job interviews, try role playing various situations to involve the group and help them gain insight.

I have made activity suggestions for each of the sessions, but don't be limited by my recommendations. Use them as a springboard to develop activities most suitable to your group. Two books, *Beyond Sex Roles*[23] and *Changing Learning, Changing Lives,*[24] present many activity suggestions.

Focus on the questions presented in the section on the Feminist Perspective (pp. 6–7).

There are a number of ways to present any of the topics. I find a combination of many techniques the most successful approach. For example, it is often helpful to begin by giving the group some specific information or ideas on the topic. The group members then need to get involved with the ideas as well and they are more likely to do so by sharing their own ideas. There are many different ways to learn, but I believe the most desirable is to engage people's active participation. When a person offers her own ideas, she becomes more confident and committed in the process.

Readings

When appropriate, I have made reading suggestions. The group might do the reading at home before the session, or people can take the time to read while the group is gathering. By asking questions, you can encourage participants to share their views.

- Did you agree/disagree with the author?
- What points were relevant to your own life?
- Was the solution suggested the only one? What else might be suggested?

Personal agreement or disagreement and interpretation offer open-ended ways for the group to respond to the readings.

Leader's References: For each topic, I have suggested the readings that might be most helpful to the leader.

Amplification

In addition to presenting each of the sessions, I suggest amplification—that is, ways to expand on the topic presented. Many of the topics become multiplied by specific issues or concerns that vary from group to group, especially with regard to the amount of time available. You might expand these sessions to run for ten, twelve, or sixteen meetings.

Session One: Introduction

Theme and Issues: The first session needs to focus on two elements—the expectations of the course and of the participants. A presentation of the course ideas and materials will give the group an opportunity to focus on the expectations of the course. Their own expectations need to be shared and incorporated into the course plan. The first session sets the tone, and because of that, it is particularly important to pay attention to detail—transportation situation; private, friendly meeting space; etc.

Presentation	**Activities**
Leader presents ideas of course. Overview of course topics to be covered with input and suggestions from group members. Initial exploration of attitudes toward women and work. Some factual or statistical information on number of women in work force, percent of women workers clearly working for economic need (e.g., single persons, single parents), changing patterns of women working outside the home (contrast to different culture, different times in history, etc.). *Guest Speaker(s):* Not appropriate *Film(s):* Overview film to bring focus on the issues, such as: *It's Not Enough*[34] *We Are Women*[39]	*Group Discussion* *Introductory Game* See Biographies or Introduction from *Personalizing Education.*[25] It is important to give more time and credit to each participant than cursory time to introduce oneself. *Small-Group Discussion* Discuss attitudes toward women and work. Group members can generate ideas, or each small group could examine various statements that express values in this area. For example: "Man may work from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done." "I don't want my wife working; I'll provide for my family." "Women only work because they want to get out of the house." "What am I going to do in fifteen years when my kids are gone and there's really not enough work for me at home?" *Questions on Values* See page 7.

In this opening session, it is important for the participants to become comfortable and familiar with one another. An introductory exercise is very helpful in getting the participants relaxed and talking with one another.

Readings	**Amplification**
"Working Women: Joys and Sorrows"[21]	Opportunity to explore more content or more depth, to broaden resource materials for group.
Leader's References: See Resources section: *Getting Yours*[18] *Personalizing Education*[25] *Beyond Sex Roles*[28]	

Session Two: The Kinds of Work Women Have Done

Theme and Issues: The second session presents a historical overview of women's contributions, stressing the value and diversity of women's work. This session can be used as an opportunity to explore the vast ways women have participated, but must also relate specifically to the participants. Credit for the value of women's unpaid work is important here.

Presentation	Activities
Review women's work, changing patterns.	*Work Women Do/Don't Do* Participants individually list in two columns work women do and don't do. Expect to counter the "don't do" list with examples of women's accomplishments— plumber — *Women at Work*[26] airline pilot — " surgeon — " truck driver — " heavy equipment opr. — " engineer — " mechanic — " farmer — *We Were There*[20] soldier — " jobs requiring strength — *Adam's Rib*[3]
Guest Speaker(s): Not appropriate *Film(s): And Ain't I A Woman?*[32] (slide show)	*Three Generations of Work* Participants individually list work that they/their mothers/their grandmothers have done. Compile list from group to get wide variation. Remind participants to list homemaking and raising children as work, as well as unusual work experiences for women.

Readings	**Amplification**
"Women and Their Work," the oral history transcript in "Oral History as a Group Process," Chapter 4 of this book. *Women at Work*[26]	Opportunity to stress particularly the contributions of women in your own geographic area—e.g., in the Midwest or the West, pioneer women; in areas where unions are strong, women's role in union organizing. *Other Films:* *Anything You Want to Be*[36] *Union Maids*[36]
Leader's References: *Women at Work*[26] *We Were There*[20] *America's Working Women*[13] *Women's Work*[7] *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*[14] "Women and Work around the World: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Sex Division of Labor and Sex Status," in *Beyond Sex Roles*[28]	

Session Three: The Value of Work

Theme and Issues: The emphasis is on women's own feelings and their values for work in their own lives. Although this is similar to the first session, it builds on the information and value-giving experience of the second session to provide a focus on the positive aspects of the participants' experience. In many ways, this session recapitulates the earlier theme; but rather than society's limitation, the stress is on the individual.

Presentation	**Activities**
The value of work *Guest Speaker(s):* Not appropriate *Film(s):* A film that keys into an individual and her own situation: *Would I Ever Like to Work*[34]	*Small-Group Discussion* Quotes from *The Quotable Woman,*[27] such as the following: "Work means so many things—so many! Among other things, work also means freedom." "Laziness may appear attractive, but it is work that gives satisfaction." "As for me, prizes mean nothing—my work is my prize." *Why Do Women Work?* Suggest that participants generate a list of reasons why they work and then code them according to these general categories: $ money ♀ self-satisfaction = meeting people; exchange * reward *Life-Planning Exercises* See *Beyond Sex Roles*[28] (pp. 28, 30, 31).

Readings	Amplification
Periodicals such as *Ms. Magazine*[29] *Working Woman*[30]	Life-Planning Exercises Goals Dreams at 16
Leader's References: *Getting Yours*[18] *Quotable Woman*[27] *Beyond Sex Roles*[28]	

Session Four: Work at Home and on the Job

Theme and Issues: The emphasis is to stress the day-to-day reality for the working woman: balancing responsibilities at home and at work; examining issues concerning child care, housework, sick children, etc.

Presentation	**Activities**

Presentation

Identifying the work of managing a home and raising children. Providing some perspective on the burden of that work as well as outside employment. Stress on the variety of ways to deal with the work at home—streamlining and setting priorities, sharing the work with the partner and children. Many studies have shown that women working outside the home spend less time on housework—examine why and what happens.

Guest Speaker(s): A remarkable individual who balances home and work especially well or a panel offering varied solutions.

Film(s): A film here should stress the diverse ways of seeking an approach rather than a "right" way.

Sylvia, Fran, and Joy[38]

Activities

Participants and/or leader generate list of household/family chores; then chart who is responsible and time involved. For example:

	self	spouse	share	kids	other	amount of time
general cleaning	✓					4 hr/wk
food: shop						1 hr/wk
prep'n	✓					1 hr/wk
clean-up	✓			✓		½ hr/day
laundry own	✓					2 hr/wk
kids'				✓		½ hr/wk
general	✓					1 hr/wk
child care					✓	45 hr/wk
driving kids	✓					1 hr/wk
budget	✓					2 hr/wk

Small-Groups

Decide on something to do for yourself in the next week. Three categories:

Free $ 0.
Under $ 5. / 1 hr–2 hr time
Under $10.

(Women—especially working women, and even more, single working parents—do not make time for their own pleasure and enjoyment.)

Readings	**Amplification**
"I Want a Wife"[17]	Depends on the tone and interest of the group. Participants may be more interested in exploring their roles as mothers and workers—examining conflicts and seeking resolution. If so, use an exercise to focus on their concerns, such as "A Working Mother's Story" from *Personalizing Education.*[25] Perhaps they are seeking more practical resolution; if so, use a guest speaker from the state day-care licensing agency on the options available in the community. Or assemble a panel of service providers.
Leader's References: *Getting Yours*[18] *The Balancing Act*[19] *Women Working*[16]	

Session Five: Job Hunting

Theme and Issues: Women are often unaware of the job market and how to go about exploring it. The session strives to build familiarity and thus confidence in dealing with job seeking. The session is especially valuable for women returning to employment after some "time out" for family, etc.; however, the clues and information are also valuable to all employed women. The initial emphasis is on discovering participants' own special skills, attributes, and interests; then on translating them into job-market terms; and finally on relating them to a potential employer.

Presentation	Activities
Job exploration, the job market, discovering individual potential, resumes versus applications, hints for the interview situation. Explore the hidden (unadvertised) job markets (85 percent of jobs are not advertised) by inviting a panel of area industry personnel officers. *Guest Speaker(s):* Area employment counselor especially clued into women's special needs; panel of employment services staff.	*Resumes* Participants list skills, interests, work (including volunteer experience); from this, sketch out a resume with dates, employers, responsibilities, etc. Share and critique resumes. *General Discussion* Participants share experiences and observations relative to the job search. *Role Playing the Job Interview* Role playing offers the most help to the potential job interviewee. An opportunity for each participant as interviewer and interviewee would add immeasurable confidence to their own real-life efforts. Prepare some really sticky role-play situations—employer asking illegal questions about number of children, child-care arrangements, or method of birth control. It's okay to make the role play difficult—a lot less risk in this situation, with a supportive group of peers, than all alone in a situation that one hasn't considered.

Readings	Amplification
The Women's Work Book[12] *The Balancing Act*[19]	This particular topic offers many possibilities for expansion and in-depth exploration. Job discrimination could compose one entire session and could include a speaker from the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, Legal Rights Division, Bar Association Women's Section, etc. Work habits, office politics, and sexual harassment on the job offer still more possibilities for expansion in this area. Prepare resumes, with a finished, typed version being the goal. Review the dos and don'ts but stress the flexibility of the resume form.
Leader's References: Resumes *The Balancing Act*[19] *Getting Yours*[18] *Woman's Work Book*[12]	

Session Six: Non-Traditional Jobs for Women

Theme and Issues: Because of the economic advantage and the importance of changing sex-role stereotypes, a full session on non-traditional employment is recommended.

Presentation	Activities
Change in access to employment. Historical look at the arguments presented for women's aptitudes being most suited to what's needed (see *Adam's Rib,*[3] *We Were There*[20]). For example, change in the sex composition of various professions, such as teachers, clerical workers, telephone operators; women's non-traditional employment in the United States in times of war and thus a changing need. *Guest Speaker(s):* One of the best possible ways to present this issue is to have a panel of women employed in non-traditional jobs. They can speak of their work, the reason for their choice, compare their job with other work experiences, discuss the attitudes toward them, etc. *Film(s):* Demonstrate non-traditional jobs: *Farewell to Welfare*[35] *Anything You Want to Be*[36]	*Photos* Participants select photos they like and dislike from *Women at Work,*[26] write a paragraph about each, and present to group. Use an overhead projector for the group to view the photo as each woman reads her paragraph. Explore attitudes toward non-traditional employment. *Careers* Play "Careers" board game (four to six players each). Most of these "careers" are not traditional for women. Discussion can focus on careers as well as values concerning money, fame, and happiness. The game is sold at most toy stores.

Readings	Amplification
Check periodicals "I Denied My Sex" from *America's Working Women*[13] *Leader's References:* *Thursday's Daughters*[15] *Adam's Rib*[3] *We Were There*[20] *Revolt of American Women*[4] *And Jill Came Tumbling After*[11]	Attitudes toward success and fear of success (Horner's studies) are a very likely extension of women's experiences in non-traditional careers. Many traditional careers for women modulate success with other values and factors. Fear of success and subsequently loss of femininity may well be issues for the group.

Session Seven: Economics

Theme and Issues: When women are employed and earning money, they are more likely to be in control of the money. Knowledge of budgeting, credit, and economics is very valuable for women. Stress should be placed on women's economic self-reliance and on the importance of handling money successfully, in contrast to the way things were in the nineteenth century.

Presentation	Activities
Historical change in women's access to money, property, etc. Review of current legislation covering fair credit, etc. *Guest Speaker(s):* Banker, credit union manager	*General Discussion* Participants share knowledge and experience of budgets, checking accounts, Christmas clubs, life insurance, stocks and bonds, mortgages, cost of travel, etc. *Questionnaire on Money* Helps to reveal attitudes toward money, how they are formed, how they differ from those of the spouse, etc. (see *Ms.*, November 1977, pp. 63–67).[29] *Consumer Tips* Prepare cards with the following: If I were to shop for _______ (orange juice, groceries, kids' clothes, an iron, fabric, a washing machine, an apartment, a house, credit, clothes for myself, etc.), I would _______________ . Have participants randomly select a card and respond. This is a good way to generate discussion and share ideas and experiences. *Small-Group Discussion* Discuss and compare topics such as the following: • A foolish purchase (buying to satisfy other needs) • A wise investment

Legally, women do not have to give the money earned from their own labors to their father or husband. Women can and should establish their own credit and control over their economic situation.

Readings	Amplification
Periodicals	Budgeting alone could take a number of sessions. Participants might work on and prepare budget sheets, keeping a daily tally of expenses for a month. Examine bargain-hunting newspapers and retail circulars as a way of increasing awareness of budgeting strategies.
Leader's References: *Getting Yours*[18]	

Session Eight: Summary and Conclusion

Theme and Issues: This concluding session offers some time to complete specific topics or areas of concern and to evaluate the results, including both the information and the changes in ideas and attitudes. It should include a summary of topics covered, issues raised, and helpful information. This concluding session should provide for closure.

Presentation	**Activities**
Teacher might offer summary of the course content by reviewing notes, taking care to restate comments by group members, as well as guest speakers, films, readings, etc. *Guest Speaker(s):* Not appropriate *Film(s):* Use a general overview film to restate some of the issues in a concluding, summarizing fashion: *We Are Women*[39]	Small groups of four discuss each of the following: • "If I Had This to Do All Over" about the course • Change in attitudes toward self, toward women in general • Evaluation (prepare questionnaire) with list of course topics, activities, etc., for rating and open-ended questions

Readings	Conclusion
Composite of group members' writing or comments.	The final session is a real opportunity to review the group's achievements. It is also important to provide a sense of gratitude and closure. A party, a celebration, the awarding of letters of completion—a ritual—serves to help the group to part, to acknowledge the impact of their time together and to further individual goals and pursuits.

RESOURCES

I have made a real effort to be specific about resource materials. Please don't consider this an absolute or exclusive list; check other resources. Although this section includes film company catalogs, most state library systems have a film collection, and state college and university systems frequently provide a film service for the general public. Access to books through interlibrary loan can be helpful. Each local area has its own resources to explore: college campuses, state libraries, film collections, women's centers, and bookstores.

GENERAL

1. Highly Specialized Promotions, 22 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201. Fifteen-page booklist. Multidisciplinary collection of books on subjects of interest to women, brought together from many publishers' collections.

TOWARD A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

2. Agonito, Rosemary, ed. *The History of Ideas on Women: A Source Book.* New York: G. P. Putnam, 1977.

   An excellent collection of views expressed by the major thinkers of Western civilization. Each piece is preceded by a brief introduction to the author and his/her general approach to the issues of women's roles. The book is very helpful in sorting out some of the reasons that our society is sexist. The presentation is roughly chronological, followed by biographical sketches in alphabetical order.

3. Herschberger, Ruth. *Adam's Rib.* New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1948.

   An especially thought-provoking book. Written in 1948, the book challenges an array of assumptions—their logic and their effects. Raises excellent questions in the scientific disciplines, e.g., the "Society Writes Biology" chapter. A quality of good humor pervades the book and makes it very readable.

4. Jensen, Oliver. *The Revolt of American Women.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971.

   A pictorial history written and first printed in 1952. Provides a sense of the change in America with regard to women from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. Visuals portray images of women and change. Excellent stimulus for discussion.

5. Kay, Karyn and Gerald Peary, eds. *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology.* New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977.

An in-depth look at films, claiming vestiges of "female culture," this collection discovers new heroines, new artists and artisans, and new women, both real and fictional. Contains a history of women's role in filmmaking that has not often been acknowledged.

6. Miller, Jean Baker. *Toward a New Psychology of Women.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1976.

   An excellent exploration that challenges sex-role stereotypes in both psychological and practical terms, while dealing with basic issues. The author takes a unique questioning posture and relates her theories through concrete case examples.

7. Oakley, Ann. *Women's Work: The Housewife, Past and Present.* New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

   A book that carefully and thoroughly examines the work common to most women. Oakley challenges assumptions and gives a scholarly and sensitive presentation. Interesting bibliography; thoroughly indexed.

8. Reiter, Rayna R., ed. *Toward an Anthropology of Women.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.

   An excellent, challenging collection of studies in anthropology that really examines the sex-role bias of anthropology.

9. Rossi, Alice S., ed. *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to De Beauvoir.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1973. Also Bantam Books, 1974.

   An anthology of basic writings by early feminists. Individual introductions by Alice Rossi, which serve to acquaint the reader with the early feminists' lives, thoughts, and historical context. An excellent reference book. The ten-page bibliography emphasizes history, sociology, and biographical material.

10. Rowbotham, Sheila. *Hidden from History: Rediscovering Women in History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present.* New York: Pantheon, 1975.

    Focuses on the political and economic influences of women. The author's presentation is restricted to Britain.

11. Stacey, Judith; Susan Bereaud; and Joan Daniels, eds. *And Jill Came Tumbling After: Sexism in American Education.* New York: Dell, 1974.

    An excellent collection of thought-provoking articles and ideas, focusing on the role education plays in developing or thwarting women's intellectual potential. Chapters include "No Women Geniuses?" "Down with Dick and Jane," "Sexism in High School," and "Are Colleges Fit for Women?"

WORK-RELATED FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

12. Abarbanel, Karin, and Gonnie McClung Siegel. *Woman's Work Book.* New York: Warner Books, 1977.

    Excellent and thorough. Presents all the key work issues: finding a job, re-entry, and women's rights in the work world. A very practical guide to job search, want ads, and interviews. Outstanding presentation of women's resumes, using a before-and-after approach. Includes a nationwide directory of occupational organizations, career-counseling services, women's centers, educational opportunities, etc.

13. Baxardall, Rosalyn, et. al., eds. *America's Working Women: A Documentary History from 1600 to the Present.* New York: Random House, 1976.

    A collection of writings and historical accounts. Emphasizes labor union activity. Some of the short essays lend themselves well to group discussion.

14. Clark, Alice. *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century.* Totowa, New Jersey: Biblio Distributors, 1968. Reprint of the 1919 edition.

    An early, scholarly volume that documents women's work in an area we might not expect. Difficult to read, but fascinating.

15. Harris, Janet. *Thursday's Daughters: The Story of Women Working in America.* New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

    Explores the particulars of women who "work hard for a living" and documents non-traditional work that women have done.

16. Hoffman, Nancy, and Florence Howe, eds. *Women Working: An Anthology of Stories and Poems.* Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979.

    A very nice collection of short pieces that can be managed within a meeting period. Excellent, on the feelings and emotional level, in describing the impact that work has on women. This book provides a real service for women to learn about the experiences of others in their own words.

17. Klagsbrun, Francine, ed. *The First Ms. Reader.* New York: Warner Books, 1973.

    A collection of short essays. Especially good for a "Women and Work" curriculum are Judy Syfers' "I Want a Wife" and Johnnie Tillmon's "Welfare Is a Women's Issue."

18. Pogrebin, Letty Cottin. *Getting Yours.* New York: Avon, 1976.

    A comprehensive handbook for employed women.

19. Scott, Niki. *The Balancing Act: A Handbook for Working Mothers.* Mission, Kansas: Sheed, Andrews, and McMeel, Inc., 1978.

    An easy-to-read book that presents very real experiences, advice, and suggestions. Focuses on the issue of home/children conflicts.

20. Wertheimer, Barbara. *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America.* New York: Pantheon, 1977.

    Documents the incredible and diverse accomplishments of American women. Features Indians, colonists, Blacks, factory workers, and pioneers, as well as depicting women's involvement in wars and labor struggles.

21. "Working Women: Joys and Sorrows." Special section in *U.S. News and World Report,* Vol. 86, January 15, 1979, pp. 64–74.

DEVELOPING THE COURSE: CURRICULUM GUIDES, TEACHING TOOLS

22. Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. *Leadership Pamphlets.* The series includes *How to Teach Adults,* Pamphlet #5, 1955; and *Leading the Learning Group,* Pamphlet #18, 1963. Order from Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 1225 Nineteenth Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.

23. Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Translated from the Portuguese by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Seabury Press, 1968.

    Radical and brilliant approach to learning. Especially helpful for oppressed groups to raise critical consciousness of their own situations.

24. Gates, Barbara; Susan Klaw; and Adria Reich. *Changing Learning, Changing Lives: A High School Women's Studies Curriculum from the Group School.* Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979.

    Detailed curriculum suggestions for high school women, but easily adaptable for adult community women. Chapters include "Messages from Society," "Growing Up Female," "Adult Sex Roles," and "Women and Work."

25. Howe, Leland W., and Mary M. Howe. *Personalizing Education: Values Clarification and Beyond.* New York: Hart, 1975.

    Designed for high school, but values clarification exercises are adaptable.

26. Medsger, Betty. *Women at Work: A Photographic Documentary.* New York: Sheed and Ward, 1975.

    Literally hundreds of photographs of women at work in both traditional and non-traditional jobs. All workers and their work sites are identified. Quotes from the women themselves reflect their attitudes toward their work, as well as others' responses to them in the work situation.

27. Partnow, Elaine. *The Quotable Woman.* New York: Anchor Books, 1978.

    A *Bartlett's* style reference book that thoroughly covers topics, quotes, and women. Great source for discussion-provoking quotes. Well indexed. Includes biographical information on authors quoted.

28. Sargent, Alice G. *Beyond Sex Roles.* St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1977.

    A detailed book of suggested exercises to explore sex-role issues: "Who Am I? What Are My Sex-Role Stereotypes?" "Our Mothers' and Fathers' Sex-Role Commandments." Presentation by a variety of writers concerning awareness of sex-role stereotypes, personal change, and social change. Exercises are a good jumping-off point for groups.

OTHER RESOURCES

Periodicals

29. *Ms. Magazine.* Subscription Department, 123 Garden Street, Marion, Ohio 43302.

    The basic monthly periodical for women concerned with feminist issues. Articles on political developments, employment, health; includes poetry, the arts, book reviews, and "No Comment," a feature that reprints sexist advertisements.

30. *Working Woman.* Subscription Department, P.O. Box 10132, Des Moines, Iowa 50340.

    Monthly magazine that focuses on women working both at home and on the job. Excellent features that offer an in-depth look at issues, e.g., day care, working pressures, and career decisions. Departments include "On Top," achievements by women; and consumer, financial, legal, and health advice.

31. Publications of the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C. 20202.

Leaflet #10 is a guide to the publications, which include *Facts about Women Workers, Nontraditional Employment, Special Groups, Standards and Legislation Affecting Women*, and *Child Care*.

Slide Shows

32. *Ain't I a Woman? A History of Women in the United States from 1600 to the Present.* Produced by Deirdre Delaney, Mary Fastaband, and Leona Pollack. Available for rental from the producers at P.O. Box 730, Boston, Massachusetts 02102.

33. *Should Welfare Mothers Be Forced to Work?* Produced by Jennie V. Stoler for the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues, Main Street, Box 58, Hyde Park, Vermont 05655.

Films

Check state, college, and university film libraries for free or low-cost rental of these and other films.

34. Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, Massachusetts 02160. Write for *Catalog of Films and Publications.* Section on Women and Society contains listings for seventeen films. Includes series on working mothers that was produced by the National Film Board of Canada during its Challenge for Change Program. Especially good are:

It's Not Enough. 16 mm, color, 16 minutes.

"This film serves as an introduction to the series and surveys the situations and feelings of working mothers in Canada. Many of the facts and attitudes are applicable to the United States. Most women work because they must, yet most women hold jobs which are less fulfilling and less well paid than those held by men."

They Appreciate You More. 16 mm, color, 15 minutes.

"What happens when a mother goes to work to supplement her husband's income? This film looks closely at the tensions, resentments, and changes that often occur. In the case of Aliette's family, the strains and difficulties have been worked through, and the family has strengthened as a result. Her husband has had to adjust his ideas about women and work, and her children have had to take an active part in the running of the household. Theirs is a family that has become stronger through understanding and the sharing of responsibilities."

Would I Ever Like to Work. 16 mm, color, 9 minutes.

"Joan has seven children, is trying to support them on welfare, and feels trapped in a life of cooking, cleaning, and child care. Abandoned by her husband, she would rather be working to support her family but cannot find the inexpensive day care that would make this possible. She speaks of what she had expected of marriage, and her disillusionment is painfully visible."

35. *Farewell to Welfare.* 16 mm, color, 30 minutes. ETA Studios. Distributed by R. H. R. Film Media, 1212 Avenue of the Americas, New York 10036.

Interviews with three WIN mothers: a truck driver, a picture framer-manager, and a machine operator, and with their employers.

36. New Day Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey 07417. Write for catalog. More than twenty films that emphasize women's issues. Tend to be expensive. Recommended for this course:

Union Maids: A Documentary about Women Organizing in the 1930's. 16 mm, black-and-white, 48 minutes. Produced by Julia Reichert, James Klein, and Miles Mogulescu.

"Sitdowns, scabs, goon squads, unemployment, hunger marches, red-baiting, and finally the energetic borning of the CIO—the 1930's were a landmark period for the American labor movement. *Union Maids* is the story of three women who lived the history and who make it come alive today."

Anything You Want to Be. 16 mm, black-and-white, 8 minutes. By Liane Brandon.

Explores the conflicting values in (a) verbally, "anything you want to be" and (b) the non-verbal limitations and suggestions of sex-role stereotypes.

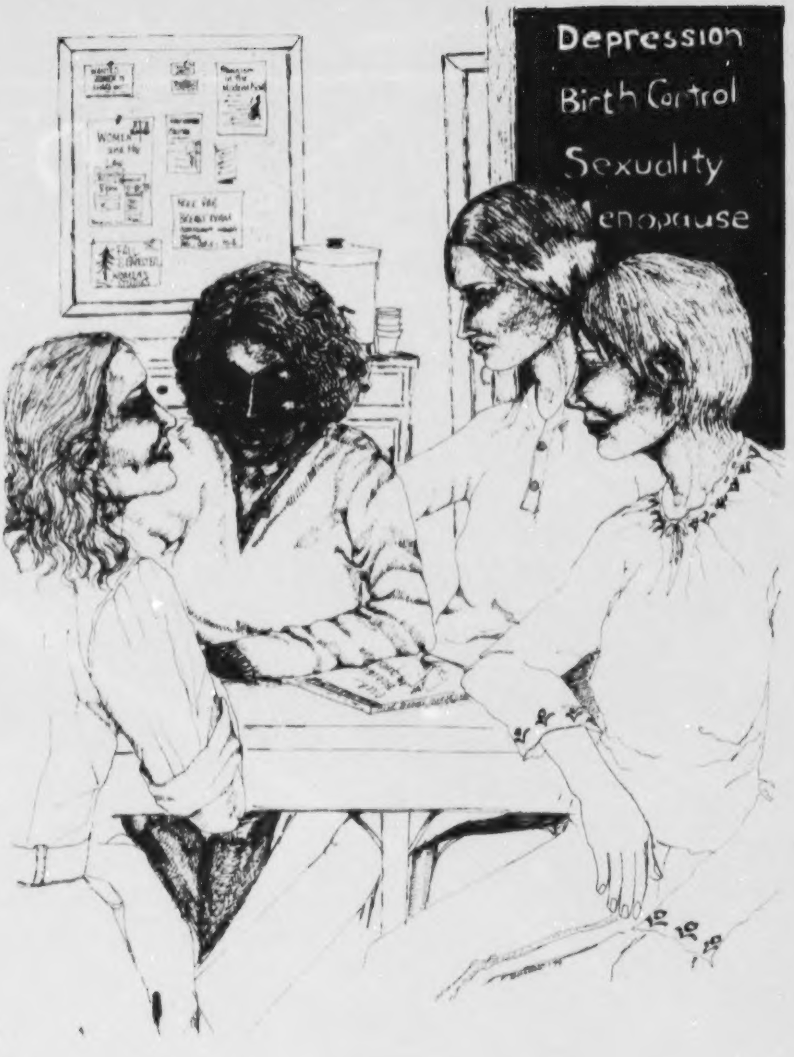
37. Star Film Library, 25 West Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02111. Distributor for a half-dozen films on women. Write for catalog.

38. *Sylvia, Fran, and Joy.* 16 mm, black-and-white, 25 minutes. Produced by Barry Spinello. Distributed by Churchill Films, 662 North Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90069, 1973.

Three young women voice their feelings about the roles of wife, mother, and housekeeper. Sylvia exemplifies the woman who is working out a sharing of both domestic (including child-rearing) and wage-earning roles with her husband. Fran, having recently left her husband, in part because of her subsidiary role in the marriage, is struggling to find a new life and identity. Joy represents the traditional housekeeper-wife-mother who accepts and enjoys her role without questioning it.

39. *We Are Women.* 16 mm, color, 33 minutes. Starring Helen Reddy. Produced by Motivational Media, 8271 Melrose Street, Los Angeles, California 90046, 1975.

This film uses dramatic vignettes, brief documentary interviews, and uniquely pertinent historical artwork delineating the origins of the traditional role of women. We see how conditioning for women's roles starts very early in the lives of women, and how it determines, to a great extent, their traditional roles. We learn that men have also been the victims of this conditioning, to the extent of affecting their health and life span. Helen Reddy, as the on-screen narrator, helps weave together the details of this visually and intellectually stimulating film.


Depression
Birth Control
Sexuality
Menopause

2. WOMEN AND HEALTH

Catherine Gates

The March day is gray and blustery. *In a basement room lit with fluorescent* lights, ten women sit together groping to find the words to express the anguish of being at home with young children all day in the siege of harsh weather. We are all mothers, and from one another we find affirmation of a confused set of feelings. All of us have very mixed feelings about being mothers and have chosen to share our feelings with one another in spite of being strangers.

THE TEACHER

How did I come to be sitting in this group? Over the years that I have been providing health care to women as a nurse and midwife, I have become increasingly concerned about the way in which women's health care needs are met. From appointments with the pediatrician to the strapping of hands and feet to a cold metal table at the moment of giving birth, women's encounters with the health care system range from their being patronized to being degraded and coerced.

The intent of Western medicine has been to convince people that they are better off turning their bodies over to the doctors in a health care situation. But people, especially women, must remain in control of their bodies to be healthy, sane, and whole. I say "especially women," because women on the average have more encounters with the health care system than men do. Women come to the health care system for help with what are actually normal human biological functions: menstruation, pregnancy, birth, lactation, menopause. These functions are treated by medical practitioners as though they were diseases, and our attitudes toward these biological processes and toward our bodies have in turn been negative.

I contend that health care situations can be used to enhance confidence in one's body and to increase knowledge about how it functions; however, this will not occur until more women control the health care system. As a necessary first step, there must be more women health care providers, but there must also be a shift in who controls the health care situation—the provider or the consumer. Women, and also men, have to become more articulate in expressing their needs

---

Catherine Gates, *thirty-four years old, is a nurse practitioner and midwife. From personal and professional experience, she has become interested in women's health care alternatives, such as home birth and self-help clinics.*

(*Note:* In this chapter, superscript numerals refer to a particular reference, correspondingly numbered, in the Resources section, pp. 46–51.)

and more effective in obtaining the care to meet their needs and those of their families. Changes won't begin to happen until women obtain enough knowledge and self-confidence to become critical health care consumers. They must learn to say no to their doctors and clinics: "No, I won't be passive and accepting any longer when I have my baby or my Pap smear or my breast examination. I am an informed health care consumer, and I expect my choices and concerns to be respected."

It was to take our bodies back, to throw off the gynecological drape, to replace medicine's negative image of women with a positive image of strong, healthy female functioning that I became interested in developing this course on women's health.

I was not trained as a teacher. My medical education as a nurse and midwife promoted a mechanical view of the body: something that breaks down and must be "repaired" by the mechanic, the medical practitioner who usually uses medication or surgery. While my beliefs do not make me a teacher, they have led me to choose what and how I would teach women about their own health care.

I work in a community health center where women bring specific complaints, such as vaginal infection or headaches, that they usually want "fixed." With this in mind, I initially drew up a list of what I felt were the health concerns that brought most women to the health center. Fortunately, instead of deciding to go ahead and "teach" all these topics, I pared the list after a planning session with the women who were to be involved in the course.

My List
contraception
pregnancy
birth
backache
insomnia
varicose veins
obesity
constipation
bladder infections
coughs, colds, earaches
household emergencies
vaginal infections
headaches
menstruation
depression
female cancers
sexuality

The Group's List
depression
exercise, backaches
smoking
nutrition
family self-help
politics of women's health
contraception
vaginitis
sexuality

This second list of topics reflected the current health care concerns and problems of the women present at the planning session. Although no preference was expressed concerning the order in which we should discuss these topics, I learned that I needed to be a responsive listener when working with this group.

A better way than beginning the course with lists of topics is planning sessions as the course goes on. That allows the greatest flexibility and in-depth coverage of topics that the group is truly interested in learning about. It was in this way that the confidence and knowledgeability about one's body that I was interested in fostering could begin. For example, one group planned to spend a session on the topic of sexuality, but went on to devote three sessions to it. For some women, dynamic changes were involved. At the end, one was able to say, "I'm not as hung up anymore—not so ashamed of my body."

Being responsive to an individual group's needs and having the flexibility to act accordingly are the most important attributes in working with groups like this. Knowledge of the factual material, although certainly important, is secondary. The factual material provided a framework for stories to unfold that were related to the women's self-image as consumers of medical care. For example, a story about an unpaid medical bill related to a premature birth emerged when discussing home versus hospital birth. The mother who spoke said, "See how trapped I feel—they've really got me," expressing her sense of impotence in relation to the medical system. The way this woman sees herself in relation to the medical system is beginning to change. She has made the first step in taking responsibility for her own health care.

THE GROUPS

How does one connect with a group like the Head Start mothers gathered together in that basement room? Most of this group had met a few times the previous fall as a mothers' group. ("Women's group" was thought by the women to be too radical and threatening a term for their male partners to accept.) Two Head Start teachers had organized this group and uncovered a wealth of feelings about motherhood.

In trying to find a way to get women together to discuss their health care concerns, I contacted the local public health nurse. She put me in touch with the women from Head Start, who knew the group was interested in the topic. We decided to work together to make this course possible, and soon the group was underway.

The second group I worked with illustrates another way to locate a group of interested women. The Health and Artisans Center is located on the outskirts of a small town in central Vermont. The Center occupies the lower half of a frame house badly in need of paint. The sign over the door is hand-painted and unofficious looking. Inside, one is greeted enthusiastically by the young, bushy-haired woman who owns and operates the Center, providing individualized exercise programs, diet counseling, and group classes for women. Near the entrance is a small playroom to entertain the children while their mothers exercise. Beyond the playroom is an exercise room, where the long wall is mirrored in squares and small posters congratulate Mary L. and Diane Y. on their weight loss and change in measurements.

The owner founded the Center two years ago. From the beginning, it has attracted primarily low-income women who, like the owner, are isolated with young children and want to build a better self-image. The changes in diet and exercise consequently provide them with an increased sense of well-being.

The owner of Health and Artisans was very interested in organizing a group to participate in a course on health. The County Extension Service aide who taught nutrition at the Center was nearing the end of her course and felt it would be natural for the participants to move on from nutrition to health care.

The support services needed for gathering women scattered in a rural area are indispensable to organizing the group. The Head Start teachers and the owner of Health and Artisans were very important in my work with the groups. Not only did they provide ongoing support that enabled change to continue, but also they were instrumental in getting people together. For the Head Start group, child care and transportation from outlying areas were provided by the Head Start teachers, who picked up the women and their children, provided a program for the children while their mothers met, and then drove everyone home. Driving time just about equaled class time. The Head Start teachers called a day or two ahead to remind each woman of the meeting. Because getting together was so complicated, class time was relatively long: 2½ to 3 hours per session.

The owner of Health and Artisans would also telephone and remind women of our meeting time. She would also get a class member with a car to pick up a woman who needed a ride. More familiar with each member than I could be, she knew why a woman could not attend a meeting and her individual situation that day.

One of the greatest problems in working with this kind of group is how to build sufficient trust within time constraints. By trust, I mean feeling safe in a situation, feeling that it's okay to say anything because the others around will listen without condemnation. Trust implies that material shared within the confines of the group will not be disclosed to the outside world; and it implies a sense of caring, a sense that the group can be relied upon for acceptance and support. It establishes a kinship system that does not exist for many of us today. Trust is an attribute fundamental to integrated individuals and to functional groups. Confidentiality should be discussed when the group first meets; its importance needs to be fully recognized by all.

The Head Start group unconsciously fostered trust right away by choosing depression as the first discussion topic. The women were able to express many private and very negative feelings. This frank self-disclosure quickly created a sense of community, even among those members who had not known one another well.

The Health and Artisans group had been in exercise classes together and had already developed a sense of trust through physical exposure to one another.

When a group is forming, its size and location are issues to determine. Eight to ten individuals seems to be a good number: small enough for intimacy to develop, but large enough to provide variety and still feel like a group if a few members cannot come to a particular session. It's hard for three or four people to generate the same kind of discussion that six or eight can.

Privacy and freedom from interruptions are the greatest attributes a meeting place can have. The basement of the local health center provided both of these and also had facilities for making coffee and tea. (Children were cared for in a separate building nearby.) Town churches or libraries often have such meeting space available.

Attendance was often problematic. The group might number ten one day, five or six the following week. That made building on the previous session's work harder. Certain groups will establish their own attendance patterns. For example, the women attending the Health and Artisans group felt that a small fee should be charged for the course and that advertising in the local paper would attract a larger number of regular participants. Approaching an organized women's group, such as a church group, the local grange, or home demonstration (Extension Service Club) groups, could be a good way to start.

The topics that served as the framework for our discussions were chosen by the women in the groups and by me. Each week, I prepared material on a given topic—for example, birth control methods—in a way that seemed most relevant to me. At our meeting, the women shared stories about their own experiences with various birth control methods or those of their Aunt Tillie. Sometimes the stories seemed quite relevant to what we were discussing, sometimes not, but together they built an understanding about birth control methods that had been shared by us all. In the course of this storytelling, I learned to tell anecdotes of my own that included the material I had prepared. A discussion of the diaphragm, for instance, brought forth a chorus of remarks like "so messy" and "so awkward." "Yes, that's true," I said, "and sometimes I feel like using a butterfly net to catch them as they fly around the examining room when someone's learning to insert one for the first time." In this way, I was able to illustrate the mechanics of diaphragm insertion. I learned not to cling tenaciously to a precise lesson plan, but worked the material into our discussion.

Although health-related topics provided the framework for discussions, what emerged from the course was expressed in statements like these: "I feel better about myself as a person and a mother and a wife. I feel less pressured." And: "Yes, I feel different. I thought before that I really wasn't important and needed." And from many: "Now I know I'm not alone, going through these changes. I'm not the only one."

CONTENT

Session One: We Call It Cabin Fever

A topic that was especially important to the Head Start group was depression. For this topic, timing was crucial because there are some predictable feelings that are experienced by rural people in the Northeast at the end of winter. Those predictable March feelings are what the women wanted to discuss, in spite of the newness of the group. What emerged from this session was that for women with young children, depression has not just personal but social causes. Isolation from other adults, lack of support from an extended family network, and lack of recognition of the work of mothering lead to extreme feelings of depression, anger toward children, and a more generalized sense of identity diffusion. The women shared stories about situations they face in their own lives.

In one group, two women who are now very close had married men who are brothers. The women described their lack of support within the family, even though both of their own families live nearby. When conflicts have arisen between husband and wife, one woman found that her own family gave sympathy and support to her husband rather than to her. She and her sister-in-law have been drawn to each other to provide the support each needs.

Much of the literature on this topic deals with depression as taboo, as something to ameliorate through medication. The causes of depression in women are ignored or brushed aside. Research on causes of depression that illustrate how this information is ignored is found in a *Psychology Today* article on self-esteem and depression.[5] I used this article as a handout in class in order to illustrate this point. Four common factors were found among depressed women: (a) they had three or more children under fourteen at home, (b) they had a husband they couldn't confide in, (c) they were not employed outside the home, and (d) they had lost their mother before the age of eleven. Seeing these reasons in print led to a discussion, which in turn revealed that the factors specified in the article were shared by the women in the group.

The author of the article, however, placed greatest importance on the early loss of the mother as the leading cause of depression. I felt angry at the author for belittling the other factors and angry at our society for not providing better institutional support for people struggling to raise families. The women in the group didn't share my anger, however, but instead experienced anger toward their kids or themselves and seemed resigned to the circumstances that define being a "wife" and "mother" in America today. I hoped these women would make the connection from their own family unit to other women suffering in the same way. Many women did express relief at recognizing that we all have to cope with similar problems and conflicts. That is a necessary first step in appreciating that the dilemmas we share have their roots in the social attitudes and institutions that control women's lives.

I was concerned that dwelling too long on depression might be discouraging to the group, so time was devoted to discussing positive aspects of motherhood. Nevertheless, several women wanted to talk more about depression and delve into patterns of family relations and violence. But because we had outlined many other topics of interest that we felt committed to covering, we did not spend more time on depression. For some individuals, it would have been productive to examine these issues further but there were others who did not want to pursue the topic. When a discussion needs to be pursued, the continuing nature of the group will allow for further exploration. Various approaches could be tried: inviting guest speakers from local mental health agencies, initiating journal writing, or reading poetry by the few women who've written about motherhood and women's emotions (Sylvia Plath comes to mind). Passages from Adrienne Rich's book on motherhood, *Of Woman Born,*[6] illustrate this cause and effect in a dramatic way and also describe the tight bond between mother and child.

Session Two: Contraception and Vaginitis

These are useful topics for promoting discussion when the group first meets because most women have had many experiences pertaining to them. Although many women consider these matters too private to discuss, the women in the Health and Artisans group were concerned about them. Contraception and vaginitis, then, became our first topics. An activity that worked well with one group was drawing a chart on the blackboard that could be completed by the group during the discussion.

	diaphragm	condom	foam	I.U.D.	pill	temperature-mucous	sterilization
what it is							
how it works							
effectiveness							
advantages							
side effects							
contraindicators							

This chart was not helpful to the other group, however. Our discussion on individual women's questions and concerns was so lively and productive that the chart only got in the way once the session began.

The various forms of vaginitis are also of interest, again because most women experience some form of vaginitis in the course of their lives. And many forms of vaginitis can be treated successfully with home remedies or herbal methods. Preventive measures for the maintenance of a healthy vagina are described in *Our Bodies, Ourselves.*[1] Specific home and herbal remedies are described in the material published by the Feminist Health Works. (See the Resources section at the end of this chapter.)

Session Three: The Politics of Women's Health

In discussing this subject, I wanted to stimulate thought about how the common health care needs of women are usually met by the medical system. Contraception, pregnancy (wanted and unwanted), births, routine examinations to detect cancer, surgery to detect or cure breast cancer, and surgery to detect or cure cancer of the uterus, cervix, and vagina are examples of physical conditions for which women usually seek care in the course of their lives.

This is a huge topic, to which many hours could be devoted. The women with whom I worked did not choose to delve deeply into this topic. However, I took the opportunity to help the group members understand that medical practitioners are not infallible. I wanted them to know that there is more than one approach to treating pregnancy, birth, or cancer of the breast and that these variations in approach needed to be explained to the woman involved. I felt it should be made clear that, in the end, each woman must be able to make the necessary decisions about her own body.

Fortunately, I found an excellent film that greatly facilitated discussion of this topic. *Taking Our Bodies Back*[13] offers an in-depth look at actual clinical situations in which women find themselves. Because the film might shock some women, a short introduction to some of its topics and their explicit portrayal in the film would be a helpful preparation for viewing. Topically, the film deals with self-help, the importance of having women gynecologists and surgeons, breast cancer and types of surgery, unnecessary hysterectomies, and an abortion clinic collectively run by women as health care consumers. Be sure to allow plenty of time afterward for discussion.

A self-help session can clarify many of the issues involved in the politics of health care. It can include a demonstration on self-insertion of a plastic speculum. An opportunity to see the cervix is a new experience for most women. Some group members may wish to try to insert a speculum themselves. Equipment needs are simple: plastic specula (obtainable through a drug company catalog or from a friendly M.D. or clinic), hand mirrors, and flashlights. Specula cost approximately fifty cents each and can be kept by participants for their own use. This technique helps demystify pelvic exams and enables a woman to see her own cervix, perhaps for the first time. It can help her determine what kind of vaginitis she may have by more closely examining the discharge and by looking at the condition of the vaginal walls; such self-examination can enable a woman to make early use of a home remedy to treat the vaginitis. The ability to insert a speculum and analyze the discharge increases the woman's self-diagnostic skills.

Self-breast exam should always be included in a self-help session. The protective benefit of knowing how to perform a self-breast exam can be of critical importance as an early cancer warning. The local American Cancer Society can provide useful films and pamphlets for this purpose.

Session Four: Women, the Healers at Home, or . . .

Wives and mothers are the primary health care workers in homes, making many common-sense decisions about treating everyday illnesses and accidents. Women's abilities in this sphere are generally unacknowledged by doctors and lay people alike.

To enhance and expand on existing knowledge, we discussed the different families' illnesses and how they had been handled. We talked about fever, vomiting, diarrhea, and coughs and colds, emphasizing the self-limitation of most illnesses and how to weather them without making a trip to the doctor's office for confirmation of what one already suspects. The importance of good home nursing measures in the comfort and speedy recovery of an ill child or another family member was emphasized. Everyone was able to share at least one account of a home accident, so that nosebleeds, head trauma, burns, convulsions, poisonings, eye injuries, and cuts and scrapes were discussed in terms of what we do and what we should do to decide on the appropriateness of home treatment or seeking professional medical help. As we finished this session, all of us wondered how children survive to adulthood.

Women can benefit from an opportunity to learn how to use medical paraphernalia such as thermometers, blood pressure cuffs, a stethoscope, and an otoscope. The chance to handle instruments and develop skill in using them can help demystify medical procedures. Such simple diagnostic skills can be used at home to help with self-diagnosis or diagnosing family members. The best resource on this subject is *Healing at Home.*[20] A local nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, or physician can help to illustrate how and when these tools are used.

Session Five: Smoking

Smoking is not an easy topic to deal with unless all members of the group want to discuss it. A useful resource is the article "Strategic Withdrawal from Cigarette Smoking."[21] The local American Cancer Society pamphlets and film I used were dated and too unsophisticated to be successful as discussion tools. Pamphlets from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services[22] provide a better approach.

Session Six: Nutrition

I approached the topic of nutrition by introducing the concept of protein complementarity as described in Frances M. Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet.*[26] We saw the film by the same title,[27] but it expressed global, futuristic concerns that were not of interest to these groups (although the film might be an excellent one to use with other women). Local resources on nutrition include the County Extension Service; in our case, the Service sponsors a dynamic nutrition teacher who regularly serves as a guest speaker.

Session Seven: Exercise

A local community college dance instructor served as guest speaker for our session on exercise. She put us all through a stretch and toning routine that emphasized lower back and abdominal muscles. It was hard for members of the group not to giggle and titter as she was teaching us the pelvic tilt; the women seemed to have trouble taking their bodies seriously. I led pelvic floor exercises taken from *Essential Exercises for the Childbearing Year.*[29]

Session Eight: Menstruation and Menopause

These issues could be discussed together or as separate topics. An excellent article on menstruation is "The New Wisdom about Menstruation"[30] by Elizabeth R. Dobell. I used this as a handout before the session to provide material for discussion. The wide range of normal variation in menstruating women is best illustrated when group members discuss difficulties with their periods. Affirmation that these physical changes are common to most menstruating women helps create positive feelings toward the cyclical female body.

Menopause is, of course, best discussed with menopausal women present. An understanding of the nature of those physical changes comes from hearing about other women's experiences; the whys and hows have more meaning in a group. Social attitudes toward menstruation and menopause, as well as the physical changes involved, are well described in Paula Weideger's *Menstruation and Menopause.*[32]

Session Nine: Sexuality

Sexuality proved to be a topic of keen interest, and we chose to spend more than one session on it. An emphasis on sexuality can make some rather dull subjects seem much more interesting. Normal anatomy is learned more readily when it is interwoven with an explanation of anatomical response to sexual excitement.

Sharing one's own sexuality with a group, challenging one's own beliefs about it, is not easy. The activities suggested here* are important ways to break the ice. The "dirty words game"[39] is a good way to spark group discussion of sexuality and desensitize people about the use of "dirty words." Asking each woman for at least three questions about sex provides an idea of general topics of interest which might be discussed in subsequent sessions. Two topics of particular importance to women are the role of the clitoris in female sexual response and clitoral versus vaginal orgasms. Reading a paragraph or two from Freud[35] illustrated the origin of the "clitoral" versus the "vaginal" orgasm theory and led to a description of how Masters and Johnson's work[37] disproved Freud's theory.

Masturbation is another topic that deserves attention. The ability to articulate what is stimulating sexually and what is not stimulating is important for women to learn. Support is often needed to help develop the ability to verbalize preferred techniques to a partner. Good resources for this were *The Hite Report*[36] and *For Yourself: The Fulfillment of Female Sexuality.*[34]

A tough issue that was not fully resolved emerged during these sessions on sexuality: that is, anger between a couple that interferes with the woman's sexual interest and response. This leads to consideration of how conflicts are resolved within the context of a long-term relationship. It's a meaty topic that one group planned to pursue.

Topics we covered in less depth were homosexuality, childhood sexuality, menopausal sexual response, male sexuality, and sexual fantasy. We discussed commonly held misconceptions about each.

Session Ten: Course Conclusion

A productive way to end a course is for the group to talk about how it went: to evaluate it. Evaluation can provide a sense of closure to the session, a time to acknowledge letting go of the group and the sessions. If the separation is temporary and the group expects to continue, some planning for future sessions can occur. Termination needs to be recognized and the group let down gently.

Evaluation can also provide valuable information for the leader. Being immersed in the teaching makes it easy to lose sight of group members' overall experience. When I asked for written evaluations, I was surprised to see the extent of changes a few women had undergone. Furthermore, this information showed me what ideas and activities had worked and what had not.

Both groups plan to meet again in the future. The Head Start group stopped meeting when summer vacation came, but planned to resume in the fall. A core of three women who wanted to continue meeting emerged from the class at Health and Artisans; they planned to recruit members. Both groups expressed a commitment to continue the changes initiated as a result of the course. As one class member said, "The feeling of need to express and exchange ideas became a strong weekly must."

---

*I am indebted to Dr. Ellen Cole, Goddard College, Plainfield, Vermont, who referred me to these activities and sources.

CONCLUSION

More important to group members than absorbing factual material is developing a sense of the individual as a person who is capable of assuming responsibility for her health care, as well as developing an ability to use the current health care system to her greatest benefit, rather than be used by it. This development begins with a sharper focus on each person's uniqueness, as well as on her commonality. It's that sense of commonality, of belonging, of fitting in, that helps each woman value herself. The ongoing support of a community of women will help each woman continue to change and grow.

RESOURCES

BACKGROUND READING

In addition to the resources mentioned below, local offices of Planned Parenthood can provide a wealth of information and written material.

1. Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women.* Second Edition. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976. Discount available to clinics and other groups providing health treatment or health counseling.

   Should be on every woman's bookshelf. A basic reference for topics of interest to women of all ages. Helpful bibliographies. The chapter on birth control is somewhat dated (for more up-to-date references, see the Contraception section below). Especially useful for sessions on Politics of Women's Health, and Contraception and Vaginitis.

2. Burack, Richard, and Fred J. Fox. *The 1976 Handbook of Prescription Drugs.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.

   Best consumer's guide to commonly prescribed drugs that I've seen. The first three chapters are a critique of the United States pharmaceutical industry.

3. Green, Thomas. *Gynecology: Essentials of Clinical Practice.* Third Edition. Waltham, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 1977.

   Basic gynecology text. Available in medical libraries or larger bookstores.

4. Netter, Frank H. *The CIBA Collection of Medical Illustrations.* Vol. II: *The Reproductive System.* New York: Colorpress, 1970.

   Excellent color pictures of the male and female reproductive systems.

DEPRESSION

5. Cohen, D. "The Link Between Self-Esteem and Depression." *Psychology Today,* Vol. II, July 1977.

   Illustrates how common causes of depression in women are not taken seriously. I used the article as a handout in class.

6. Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1976.

   An excellent book on the institution of motherhood—its historical development and how it functions currently. Written from a feminist perspective. I used pages 256–280 for classroom reading.

7. Winnicott, D. W. *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World.* New York: Penguin Books, 1964.

   A British pediatrician and psychoanalyst's thoughts on the various stages of childhood. Winnicott coined the phrase "a good enough mother," which I liked and which I have not found developed elsewhere.

CONTRACEPTION

The best all-round pamphlets on contraception and related topics are available from Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, Inc. Write for publications list and prices to Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood, 1850 Vine Street, Denver, Colorado 80206.

8. Emory University Family Planning Program. *Contraceptive Technology; The Joy of Birth Control;* and *The View from Our Side.* Brochures. Available from Emory University Family Planning Program, Educational Materials Unit, 69 Butler Street, SE, Atlanta, Georgia 30303.

   Good resources. *Contraceptive Technology* provides up-to-date information in detail and is very useful for a course such as this one. Updated every two years. *The Joy of Birth Control,* by Stephanie Mills, offers good information in a magazine format. *The View from Our Side* is a pamphlet by and for men on sexuality and contraception.

9. Nofziger, Margaret. *A Cooperative Method of Natural Birth Control.* Summertown, Tennessee: The Book Publishing Co., 1976.

   Clear description of how to practice the temperature-mucous method of birth control. Can be obtained in bookstores but less expensive from the local Planned Parenthood office. Also, the Ovul-index thermometer by Linacre Labs (New York, New York 10017) comes with fairly complete instructions for this method. The thermometer does not accompany this book.

10. Seaman, Barbara, and Gideon Seaman. *Women and the Crisis in Sex Hormones.* New York: Bantam Books, 1978.

    Update on the pill, DES, estrogen replacement therapy: side effects, risks, and safe alternatives.

11. Smith, Betty. *An Overview: Oral (and Other) Contraceptives.* Phoenix: Do It Now Foundation, 1979. Low-cost pamphlet available from the Foundation, P.O. Box 5115, Phoenix, Arizona 85010.

VAGINITIS

Helpful pamphlets that list alternatives to the usual medical treatments are available from the Feminist Health Works, 487A Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014. Local Planned Parenthood offices also have a useful brochure, *Keep Your Flora Flowering.*

THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S HEALTH

It's hard for me to say where I've read what I have that has helped me shape my sense of the politics of women's health. It's an attitude I've developed from working within the system and talking with others, as well as from reading. Below are some of the many resources available that address this issue.

12. Annas, George. *The Rights of Hospital Patients: The Basic Guide to Hospital Patients' Rights.* New York: Avon Books, 1975.

    One of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) handbooks. Includes a chapter on women. Valuable information, including a model bill of rights for patients (p. 355).

13. Cambridge Documentary Films. *Taking Our Bodies Back.* 16 mm, color, 33 minutes. Available for rental or purchase from Cambridge Documentary Films, Box 385, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

    "Best film to date on women's health care"—*Our Bodies, Ourselves.*

14. Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness.* Glass Mountain Pamphlet No. 2. Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1973.

15. __________ . *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers.* Glass Mountain Pamphlet No. 1. Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1973.

16. *Your Rights as a Hospital Patient.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Boston Chapter of the Medical Committee on Human Rights, 1977. Available from the Boston Chapter of the Medical Committee on Human Rights, 32 Alpine Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138.

    Low-cost brochure, available in quantity. Outlines rights and remedies. Supportive of community organizing and community action.

EMERGENCIES

In addition to the resources below, your local poison control center may have free pamphlets and stickers for the home. You can reach this agency by calling the nearest hospital and asking for the state poison control center.

17. Arena, Jay M. "Child Safety Is No Accident." *Medical Times,* Vol. 107, No. 4 (April 1979), pp. 79–86.

Covers when and why most accidents occur. I didn't like its scare-tactic tone, but it has complete statistics and an approach toward prevention that is helpful. Includes the Heimlich Maneuver (see below).

18. Green, Martin. *A Sigh of Relief: The First-Aid Handbook for Childhood Emergencies.* New York: Bantam Books, 1977.

    Well-illustrated guide to child safety and emergency procedures. Contains the basics and has a nice section on equipment safety (outdoor and indoor). Omits the Heimlich Maneuver (see below).

19. Heimlich, Henry J., and Milton H. Uhley. "The Heimlich Maneuver and Historical Review of Literature on Choking," in *Clinical Symposia,* Vol. XXXI, No. 3, 1979. Available at a medical library or order from Medical Education Division, CIBA Pharmaceutical Co., Summit, New Jersey 07901.

    Contains in-depth information on the treatment of choking that many general references lack.

FAMILY SELF-HELP

20. Howell, Mary. *Healing at Home: A Guide to Health Care for Children.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.

    Written in a warm, supportive tone. Introduces clinical pediatrics and goes a long way toward helping parents, especially mothers, gain a sense of competence and assurance in dealing with their children's health at home.

SMOKING

21. Christen, A. G., and K. H. Cooper. "Strategic Withdrawal from Cigarette Smoking." *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians,* Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (March–April 1979).

    Covers why smoking is pleasurable and discusses the dynamics of quitting. Proposes an aerobics exercise program as part of the quitting regimen.

22. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Calling It Quits.* Publication #78-1824. Available from the Office of Cancer Communications, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Maryland.

    Another helpful pamphlet to accompany the Christen and Cooper article. Advice on how to give up cigarettes. Uses cartoons and one-liner jokes.

23. __________. *Why Do You Smoke?* DHHS/NIH Publication #78-1822. Available from the Office of Cancer Communications, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Maryland.

    A useful pamphlet to accompany the Christen and Cooper article. Tests the motivation behind smoking.

NUTRITION

24. Burton, Benjamin. *Human Nutrition.* Third Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

    Basic nutrition text for professionals and non-professionals.

25. Kirschmann, John D. *Nutrition Almanac.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

    Basic nutrition text, written for non-professionals. Includes unique section on diseases and how to treat them with diet or vitamins. Heavy emphasis on vitamins, but at least addresses the issue of nutrition as therapy.

26. Lappe, F. M. *Diet for a Small Planet.* Revised Edition. New York: Ballantine Books, 1975.

    In-depth explanation of protein complementarity. Includes recipes.

27. Bullfrog Films. *Diet for a Small Planet.* 16 mm, color, 28 minutes. Available for rental or purchase from Bullfrog Films, Oley, Pennsylvania 19547.

    Based on the book by F. M. Lappe. Global, futuristic orientation.

EXERCISE

28. Lettvin, Maggie. *Maggie's Back Book: Healing the Hurt in Your Lower Back.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976.

    Written for people with acute or chronic back problems. Outlines exercise remedies to cure the hurt and covers preventive posture and exercises. Well illustrated and clearly explained.

29. Noble, Elizabeth. *Essential Exercises for the Childbearing Year: A Guide to Health and Comfort Before and After Your Baby Is Born.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976.

    Written primarily for the expectant and new mother. Best in-depth description I've seen on exercises for the pelvic floor. The chapter on pelvic floor exercises provides background information. I used pages 41–44 as a classroom handout.

MENSTRUATION AND MENOPAUSE

30. Dobell, Elizabeth Rodgers. "The New Wisdom about Menstruation," in *Redbook,* Vol. 152, March 1979, pp. 199–206.

    A detailed look at the historical reasons behind current social attitudes toward menstruation. The author calls for a model of health that includes recognition of the cyclic nature of women.

31. Reitz, Rosetta. *Menopause: A Positive Approach.* Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Co., 1979.

    Solid advice for women of all ages who are facing body changes. Views menopause as a positive, natural experience.

32. Weideger, Paula. *Menstruation and Menopause: The Physiology of Psychology, The Myth and the Reality.* New York: Knopf, 1976.

Discussion of the biology and psychology of the female cycle and the cultural taboos surrounding the monthly cycles of women. Helps free us from deeply ingrained, negative ways of thinking about ourselves.

33. Wolfe, Sidney. "Feminine Straight to the Grave." *Mother Jones,* Vol. III, No. 5 (May 1978), p. 18.

A critical look at the currently routine use of estrogens during the female life cycle.

SEXUALITY

34. Barbach, L. G. *For Yourself: The Fulfillment of Female Sexuality.* New York: Doubleday, 1975.

Written for pre-orgasmic women. Excellent source of information on female sexuality, especially sections on masturbation and orgasm.

35. Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.* Translation of original German-language edition published in 1905. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Outlines Freud's basic theories on female sexuality. I used this as part of developing a historical perspective on women's sexuality.

36. Hite, Shere. *The Hite Report.* New York: Macmillan and Co., 1976.

Based on a survey of 3,000 women, the book challenges some current stereotypes about female sexuality. This is my favorite book for quotes. Its length makes it hard to read straight through.

37. Masters, W. H., and V. E. Johnson. *Human Sexual Inadequacy.* Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970. Major research on sexual dysfunctions. Outlines treatments—shows success.

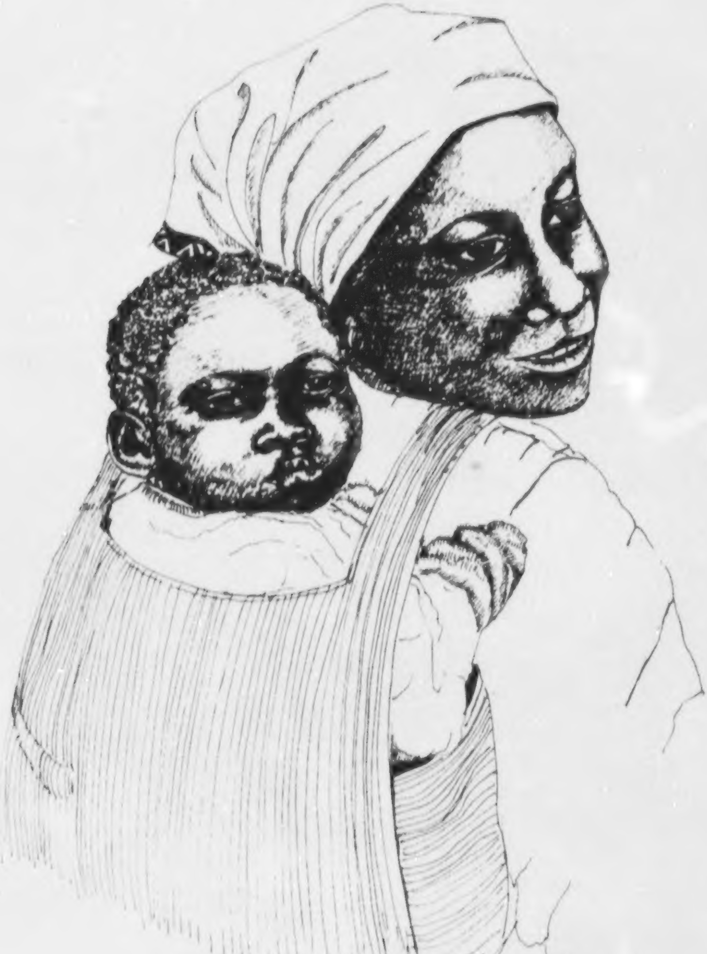
38. __________ . *Human Sexual Response.* Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966. Research that began to destroy many myths about sexuality.

39. Morrison, Eleanor S., and Mila Underhill Price. *Values in Sexuality: A New Approach to Sex Education.* New York: Hart, 1974.

Contains the "dirty words game" I used.

40. Wilson, Sam, et al. *Human Sexuality: A Text with Readings.* Second Edition. St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1977.

An easy-to-read text, containing basic information.



PARENTING: ISSUES IN WOMEN'S LIVES

Sue Hooper

Parenting is not a self-contained activity. It influences and is influenced in turn by all other aspects of a mother's life. Although parenting is a worthwhile topic in its own right, its interdependent nature makes it an excellent point of departure for helping women approach other issues and concerns.

> When I scream at the kids all the time, it affects my relationship with my husband.
>
> My boyfriend's mother keeps interfering, telling me how *she* thinks I ought to be raising the children.
>
> I don't know how to get back into the job market after fifteen years of raising children and keeping a home.

Consciously or unconsciously, many women define themselves primarily as care givers. This is especially true of mothers who, perhaps engulfed by the intensity of their relationships with their children, may have begun to view the care of their children as their main purpose in life and as their primary source of personal reward. A course on parenting provides such women with a reason, albeit a pretext, for beginning to work on self-awareness: on themselves. Women may rationalize, "If I understand myself better, that will help me become a better parent, which will in turn help my family." But as women talk together and begin to encourage and support one another, they have less need to look for external reasons for talking and thinking about themselves.

Parenting, then, is an accessible topic for many women. Just below the surface, however, the issues can become emotional and threatening. Raising children is an enormous responsibility, one for which few mothers are prepared. Women may love their children and at the same time resent the stress and tedium entailed by caring for them and working in the home. Rural, low-income mothers in particular, because they are often isolated and dependent upon others for transportation, may find no escape from the constant demands and chores of raising children. For some, resentment and frustration lead to anger and despair:

Sue Hooper *has worked in the Vermont public schools as a teacher, an aide, and a volunteer. She taught Lamaze childbirth classes for four years and also worked for a small family center agency in north central Vermont. She and her husband are the parents of a six-year-old child.*

(*Note:* In this chapter, superscript numerals refer to a particular reference, correspondingly numbered, in the Resources section, pp. 67–71.)

67

What's *wrong with me* that I feel
so angry at my child?

How could I even *think* of hurting
an innocent, helpless child?

When I was growing up I vowed that
things would be different when *I*
had kids, but now I hear myself
saying the same things to my kids
that my mother used to say to me,
and that scares me.

GOALS

Fear, guilt, and a sense of inadequacy are feelings shared by many mothers. These feelings are seldom divulged and may not even be acknowledged by the mothers themselves. Many women, especially those in rural areas, have few, if any, opportunities to discuss their concerns and anxieties. The first goal of this course was to provide that opportunity—to provide a warm, supportive atmosphere in which experiences and feelings could be shared with others, and in which it would be possible to overcome the feeling of isolation—of being the only one who can't deal with her children, who's discontented, who's angry, who's depressed.

The second goal was to foster effective communication, helping women get to the heart of their problems so they could begin to improve their relationships—those with their children in particular—and to assume more control over their own lives.

A course such as this can begin the process of helping women to place themselves in the center of their lives; to see themselves as women who also may be mothers, daughters, partners, workers, thinkers—whatever—but who are not limited by these roles. The course can help these women view their roles as activities and relationships in which they participate and over which they can exert some control.

ORGANIZING THE GROUPS

This curriculum was developed from the experience of leading two discussion groups in central Vermont. Because the groups met during the day, attendance by some working women was precluded. All of the participants of both groups were mothers. Only a few held paying jobs, and those who did were employed part time; however, the majority of the women had been employed outside the home before bearing children.

The members of the first group were brought together by advertising and by word of mouth. An article appeared in the local paper, and notices were posted around town and handed out through local agencies. The group was advertised as a discussion group for mothers. The publicity was free of jargon and contained no income guidelines.

This first group **met one morning** a week for nine consecutive weeks. The mothers brought their pre-school-age children, and child care was provided. We met at the local youth center, where there were separate spaces, divided by a door, for mothers and children. Knowing that we wouldn't be interrupted helped us relax and talk more easily. Sitting in a circle as we talked and sharing a simple snack also helped to create an intimate atmosphere. This group ended by mutual but reluctant agreement when the public schools closed for summer vacation.

The second group was an ongoing, self-help group of low-income mothers. Since its inception it had been set up as a special time for the women only, without their children. Each mother was responsible for making her own child care arrangements. The group met for a full day each week, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 or 4:00 p.m., at the apartment of one of the members. To present the course, I took over the leadership of the group temporarily, for four of the one-day sessions.

For mothers of young children, the home is often a high-stress working environment. Most of the women in both groups felt overwhelmed by the pressures of day-to-day living. Parenting was not the only concern they brought into the groups. They were also concerned about issues of femininity, role restriction, and financial and emotional insecurity; some were concerned about their health and appearance, especially about being overweight. These other concerns eventually surfaced in the discussions.

LEADING THE GROUP

A prospective group leader must prepare carefully for the course, and reading is an excellent way for her to begin. Books listed at the end of this chapter under Resources can provide her with necessary background information. Taking the time to talk with others about her ideas and plans for the course is also important. She should try to discover her own attitudes toward child rearing and toward women's concerns so that her personal biases do not color the issues once the course is underway.

Because sharing experiences and feelings is at the heart of the course, it is crucial for the leader to recognize that her role is not to "teach" in the traditional sense of imparting information, but rather to promote trust and to foster participation. There must be an understanding among the participants that anything personal discussed in the group will remain confidential. The leader must be as sensitive as possible to the values of the other members of the group so that she doesn't inadvertently offend anyone. In addition, it is crucial that she try to express her opinions and feelings in nonjudgmental ways and that she encourage the other women to follow this example.

The emphasis is on women helping women, on women beginning to consider *themselves* the experts. Therefore, it is important for the leader to encourage the participants to help one another rather than look to her for "answers." It is helpful if she is a mother herself and participates with the group in learning to be a better parent. Then her special status as leader of the group is deemphasized and her own parenting experiences can enrich the group.

The leader should try to find a comfortable level of self-disclosure: none, and she is "above" the group; too much, and she is taking advantage of the group. She should draw from a variety of her own experiences, both successful and disappointing.

Self-disclosure is one way for the leader to illustrate points she wishes to convey. Films, book excerpts, and handouts can also be used, and are more effective if they present personal experiences the women can relate to than if they present general philosophies or approaches.

As she guides the discussion, the leader should try to ensure that all of the women have the opportunity to take part while not feeling pressured to do so. In addition, it is vital that she be a good listener and that she cultivate listening skills among the other members of the group.

CONTENT

The curriculum below is presented only as a guide. Group leaders interested in working with these materials are encouraged to modify and adapt them, picking the topics and activities that seem most promising and incorporating their own materials and ideas as well.

Having an overview of the workshop and planning the sessions are the leader's responsibility. However, the participants, bringing their own strengths, concerns, hopes, and frustrations to the group, will also have a major part in determining the course content. For this reason, the material here is divided by topics rather than by sessions. The relative importance of the topics will vary from group to group; discussion of a given topic might require only part of a session in one group and several sessions in another.

While activities are suggested to encourage self-understanding, communication, and the emergence of a women's perspective, they should be used to supplement, not replace, the discussion. Two activities, journal keeping and relaxation exercises, are presented first because they are not tied to the consideration of any specific topic. Both journal keeping and relaxation exercises can be started early in the course and continued indefinitely. They are easily modified to fit the specific needs of a group or individual, and can be practiced by the women independently of the discussion group. Also, both activities help women gain self-awareness.

Journal Keeping

If any one activity is central to this course, it is journal keeping. Journals, when filled with concrete examples of the problems and issues women face in their daily lives, can provide much of the basic data for the course. If journals are used, it is important that the women's privacy be respected. Group members should decide for themselves if they wish to share what they have written.

Although the leader can suggest topics for journal entries, participants should feel free to use the journals as they wish. Depending on the group, it may be advisable for the leader to suggest topics that do not require much writing; this way, women who have difficulty writing or limited time for keeping journals will not become discouraged. Even if a woman does not keep a journal, just thinking about a topic during the week is a valuable activity and can lead to insights.

Journal topics related to the discussion are generally the most helpful. For example, when talking about the developmental stages of children, participants might observe and write down the self-initiated activities of their children; when talking about discipline, they might note situations calling for varying degrees of discipline; and when talking about becoming more assertive, they might note the times they wish they had spoken up for themselves.

Keeping journals can help women become more conscious and more reflective about their lives. For example, when asked to use their journals for recording the things they say to their children, women may begin to "hear" themselves for the first time. By learning to "hear" and to "watch" more perceptively, women may begin to recognize their own self-defeating behaviors. Such recognition is often the necessary first step to changing those behaviors.

Journals can be vehicles for helping women get in touch with their feelings, and the time spent in writing or reviewing journal entries can lead to greater self-awareness and self-understanding.

Relaxation Exercises

For many women, particularly for those rearing young children, tension is a constant companion.

> The kids get on my nerves. When they're
> after each other all the time, I can
> just feel myself getting more and more
> uptight.
>
> I just get all tensed up inside. That
> and the weight I've put on are driving
> my blood pressure up. Just like my
> Mom—she's on medicine for her high
> blood pressure.

Many women do not fully realize just how tense they are much of the time or what particular circumstances contribute to their tension. In fact, many women are amazingly out of touch with their bodies. Such women may mistreat fatigue by drinking too much coffee, may eat when they are not hungry, and may respond to tension with sharp words or tears. These spontaneous, mindless responses to tension are particularly destructive, because instead of relieving the situation causing the tension, the responses usually intensify it, producing a vicious circle. Learning to relax helps women to get in touch with their own bodies and to spare their bodies from undue stress, and it makes it easier for them to work on improving the situations needing attention. The kind of relaxation exercises used is a matter of leader preference. Progressive tension/relaxation was used in this course (see Resources). It is essential that the leader try the exercises she plans to use so that she is familiar and comfortable with them.

The leader should be aware that some of the participants may be anxious and self-conscious about their bodies, and that embarrassment is often intensified for those who are overweight. Also, some of the women may be reluctant to touch or be touched by others. Therefore, relaxation exercises are better postponed until a sense of trust has built up within the group. Even then, the leader should proceed very carefully, beginning with a short exercise that lets the women remain seated, and moving to longer floor exercises gradually over the next several weeks. Group members should feel free to refrain from any specific part of the exercise or even the entire activity. The exercise is less threatening if the leader uses common names for the parts of the body: "stomach" instead of "abdomen," for example. It may be necessary for the leader to assure the group that the activity of relaxation is neither occult nor mysterious, as some of the participants may be suspicious:

> It isn't meditation, is it? That's
> Devil's work!

A leader using the tension/relaxation method should explain that tensing a muscle means making it firm rather than extremely tense, and that the tension need not be held for long periods of time. Participants may omit tensing parts of the body that are sore, as may be the case after physical strain or during menstruation. They should flex their toes because pointing them can cause a painful charley horse. It is important for the women to be comfortable during the relaxation exercises, and they should use pillows and change positions as necessary.

> It felt different when my neck and
> shoulders started to relax.

As the participants begin to relax, they may realize for the first time how much tension is collected in some part of the body. Being able to relax is something that women can learn to do for themselves, and can be one step in their gaining control over their lives.

Curriculum

The body of the curriculum, divided into topics, follows. The presentation is designed to give the reader some sense of the group process, of how discussions might build upon and flow into one another.

Although ten topics follow, the course is "about" parenting, and parenting is the first major theme. Gradually the subject under discussion shifts from parenting to assertiveness, the other main theme. The issues involved in both parenting and assertiveness are similar—how to treat oneself and others with respect and how to express one's feelings, wants, and opinions in direct and honest ways. It's the focus that changes. During discussions about parenting, the focus is on one's relationships with one's children; during discussions about assertiveness, the focus is on one's relationships with the world at large. In making this transition, women move from thinking of themselves as mothers first and women second to thinking of themselves first as women.

Topic One: Understanding Children Better

In general, it is a good idea to begin the course with a neutral topic, putting off more sensitive issues until some trust and support has developed among the members of the group. For this reason it seemed important to focus on the children, not on the women themselves, at the beginning. In addition, it's often appropriate to provide the participants with some concrete information so they won't feel pressured to make their own agenda right away.

The first session of this course was begun by giving the women information to help them understand their children better.

1. *Ages and Stages.* A handout on the normal and predictable stages that children go through was used during the first session (see Resources). Other topics and other vehicles—films, book excerpts, etc.—could easily be substituted. The handout provided a good jumping-off point for the discussion and gave some of the mothers immediate reassurance.

> Oh, so it's not *all my fault* that
> Johnny's not as easygoing at four as
> he was at three.
>
> You mean this kind of behavior is
> *normal* for an eleven-year-old?

Because the topic was used for reassurance, the handout stressed that children are individuals and not all on the same timetable. It was also significant that the handout included only the emotional and psychological development of children—not their motor or speech development, which are areas wherein children's rates of development are often compared competitively.

"Ages and Stages" introduces the idea that conflict between parent and child is not necessarily bad; rather, it can signal that the child is developing normally and progressing toward eventual independence.

Independence can be a sensitive issue. Some mothers, because of their self-images as care givers, may themselves be dependent upon their children's

72

dependence. Such mothers may not foster independence in their children, but, consciously or unconsciously, may try to keep their children dependent. Some participants may feel defensive about the issue of independence, and the leader should approach it with caution.

2. *Generation Gap.* This topic is especially appropriate if many of the mothers have adolescent children. For a small group of women, a discussion session works best. A larger group can be subdivided according to the decades when the women were sixteen years old. Each of the subgroups is then given a list of topics such as: relationships with parents, school attendance and performance, household responsibilities, drinking, drugs, sex, curfews, and dress. The subgroups then list what the prevailing norms were for each topic when they were teenagers. When tabulated (on a blackboard or flip chart), the results will demonstrate dramatically how quickly times are changing, and they may help the mothers better appreciate differences in outlook between themselves and their teenage children.

Topic Two: Parenting—Supporting Strengths

It is important to support women as they *are* and to build upon their strengths. Women who raise children and work in the home often get very little support for what they do. They are unpaid workers in a society in which the value and prestige of a job are judged by the salary it commands. It is important for the leader to acknowledge to the group not only that raising children and keeping house can be difficult and stressful activities, but also that they are valuable activities—that they *are work.* Many of the women who came to the groups felt inadequate as parents, and it was important to help them see some positive aspects of their parenting.

1. *Journals.* Journals were distributed near the end of the first session, and the women were asked to write the following: (a) something they liked about each of their children; (b) something they liked to do with their children; and (c) something they liked about themselves as parents. They were encouraged to include small things, to add to their lists later, and to tell their children about the things they had written.

2. *Simple (and Cheap) Activities to Do with Children.* Some women may not know what kinds of activities they can do with their children. By building upon the "Ages and Stages" discussion and by sharing ideas with each other, women can collaborate on a list of activities appropriate for children of different ages. These activities not only can help keep children occupied, but also can help the mothers feel better about themselves as parents by giving them a way to contribute positively to their children's development and to enjoy being with their children.

It might be helpful to collect suggestions for activities over several weeks to give the mothers more time to think about them. The list, when duplicated, can be shared with other groups of parents.

Topic Three: Parenting—Identifying the Problems

Women may come to a course on parenting because they know that *something* is wrong at home—perhaps they yell all the time or perhaps they "can't do anything" with one of their children—but they may not know just what situations trigger their own outbursts or their children's sulkiness. Before things at home can be improved, the underlying problems must be identified.

1. *Journals.* Using journals is an excellent way to help women understand how they really interact with their children. One week's assignment might be for the mothers to listen to the things they say to their children and then to write them

down, in particular trying to discover what things they find themselves saying over and over again. Such an exercise is often enlightening:

> Now I know why my kids don't listen to me—
> I must say the same thing fifty times a day.

Mothers might hear themselves saying things they wished they hadn't said and may be surprised to discover how often they resort to name-calling.

Another week the women might listen for and record not only the things they say to their children, but also the things their children say to them. In particular, they can listen for comments such as "Why can't you ever . . ." or "You'll never . . .". Reflecting on such comments can lead to useful insights.

Journals can also be used to record situations the women handled well, situations they didn't know how to handle and want help with, or things they noticed for the first time or learned about themselves or their children.

2. *Reversing Roles.* This exercise is one for the mothers to try at home. In the middle of a "conversation" with one of her children, perhaps when her voice is getting louder and her temper shorter, the mother stops the action suddenly and suggests to the child, "You do what I was just doing and I'll do what you were doing." Even fairly young children often catch on quickly. Some interesting insights ("I was doing *that*?") can result.

Topic Four: Parenting—Improving Skills

Most women come to a course on parenting hoping to become better parents. Although it's often desirable to start working on parenting skills right away, at least to a limited extent, it is only after the women have identified the areas needing improvement that they can start to work in earnest.

Many kinds of learning contribute to better parenting. These include learning to discipline children more effectively, to talk with children instead of at them, to express anger safely, to encourage rather than discourage children, and to help children become independent. In order to understand what is involved in good parenting, it is essential that the leader read books on the subject or at least be familiar with the principles and techniques they describe. (See Resources.)

The discussion group becomes a major source of support for the women as they work on improving their parenting skills, and the discussions give them the opportunity to learn from and encourage one another. The discussions can be supplemented by role playing, films, listening exercises, etc. Journals can be used by the participants to record progress in changing old patterns, feelings of elation or discouragement, and changes in their children's behavior.

Participants trying to change old patterns need to be reassured that recognizing a problem area is itself a big step. Old habits are hard to change and new approaches can seem awkward at first. Some backsliding is inevitable, and participants who become discouraged need extra support and encouragement. Putting new parenting skills into practice takes a long time, and it is essential that the participants feel free to discuss their progress weekly, even if the focus of the discussions has moved away from the subject of parenting.

Topic Five: Families

When women see their efforts resulting in improvements at home, they begin to feel better about themselves and their families, and they may be ready to take a closer look at the relationships within their families.

1. *Sharing Photos.* Once the group has been together for a while, the mothers might like to bring in pictures of their children to share with the group. Having already heard about one another's children, the women enjoy seeing what the chil-

dren look like. Some women may want to bring in other pictures as well. Sharing photos is a way for the women to make their lives more real to one another and can enhance the sense of intimacy among the members.

2. *Family Constellations.* Each member of a family has a unique relationship with every other member, and the addition of new members to the family not only introduces new relationships, but also influences all of the preexisting ones. Birth order influences an individual's behavior, and some patterns of behavior may correspond to a person's position in the family.[7] The influence of birth order, both on the participants and on their children, provides an interesting discussion topic.

If the group is large enough, the members can form smaller groups according to their places in the birth order—i.e., separate groups for single children, oldest children, middle children, and youngest children. Each group then generates a description of the experiences associated with its particular place in the "family constellation." The descriptions are then shared with the reassembled group, perhaps being recorded on a chalkboard or flip chart. Discussion should follow, comparing the sibling influences felt by the mothers with those felt by their children.

3. *Messages.* For this exercise each woman is asked to write a "message"—in a sentence or two—on each of the following subjects: (a) something she wishes her children would say to her now; (b) something she wishes her children would say to her when they are her age; (c) something she wishes her mother would say to her now. Depending upon the size of the group and the degree of trust and intimacy among members, the participants' responses can remain private, or they can be discussed in pairs, in small groups, or in the group as a whole. Writing and perhaps talking about messages can help women make connections between the parenting they received as children and the parenting they are giving to their own children.

4. *Family Sculptures.* A leader wishing to use this exercise should first read the description of it by Virginia Satir in *Peoplemaking.*[31] Making the sculptures, as described by Satir, is a group activity in which one person creates a sculpture using other group members as figures. An alternative which permits all of the participants to work on their own sculptures at the same time is to make paper sculptures. In this case, each woman is given a sheet of paper with a circle drawn on it to represent the boundary of her family. Small pieces of paper with names written on them are used to represent her family members. She moves the small pieces around on the larger sheet, and finding an arrangement that seems right, tapes them in place. Making the paper sculptures goes quickly, but discussing them afterward is likely to require a lot of time.

The sculptures can be made of current families and/or families of origin, and making them can help the participants understand the dynamics of their families. For some of the women, the exercise may be an emotional one and may involve a great deal of risk. Therefore, it is important that it be introduced to the group only after a sense of trust has developed. Even then, some women may be hesitant to discuss or even participate in the exercise, and their reluctance must be respected.

Topic Six: Parenting—A Shared Experience

As the women start to understand their families better, they are ready to think about the roles other people play within their families. Considering how these "significant others" share—or might share—the responsibilities of child rearing is important, especially for single parents.

To approach the subject of parenting as a shared experience, the women might discuss questions like the following: What people had positive influences on them when they were small? What did those people do that was helpful? Whom have they themselves influenced? How? Who are the significant others in their children's lives? What is the father's role in parenting? What would they like the father's role to be? How can the contributions of fathers be compensated for in single-parent families? Who are the significant others in their own lives? How important are their women friends? their men friends? What are the rewards and obligations of friendship?

1. The *Family Sculptures* exercise can be expanded to include significant others.

2. *Journals* can be used by the participants to record the kinds of support they give and receive during the week, as well as the times they would have liked to give or receive more support.

Topic Seven: Sex-Role Stereotyping and Non-Sexist Child Rearing

Thinking about sharing the responsibilities of parenting with others leads women to examine their own roles and expectations. As they do so they begin to realize for the first time how their lives have been influenced by sex-role stereotyping. This realization is hard for many women, perhaps low-income women in particular, to face. Yet, by talking together about their own experiences, the participants may become more receptive to women's issues, and may start thinking about how they can move toward a fuller, more equitable life for themselves and for their families.

Discussion can help participants become aware of how sex-role stereotypes are perpetuated. The women might discuss their own upbringing, perhaps by using the format of the "Generation Gap" exercise from Topic One to emphasize different expectations for boys and for girls.

1. *Journals.* Journals can be used to help women identify differences between the ways they treat their sons and their daughters. Discussion can lead to suggestions for minimizing the effects of sex-role stereotyping at home; for example, not giving girls all the household chores or boys all the outdoor chores, and not telling boys that it isn't "manly" to cry or girls that it isn't "ladylike" to ask for what they want.

2. *Looking at Pictures.* Participants can look at photo books, make collages, or select pictures from a group of illustrations, explaining the reasons for their choices, Examining pictures of women, men, girls, and boys from popular magazines can prove enlightening when the pictures are viewed with an eye toward sex-role stereotyping. Pictures of women from popular magazines are also an excellent source for exploring advertisers' images of "femininity" and the "ideal woman."

Topic Eight: Time

As women become less dependent upon their roles as care givers, they might begin to question how they are spending their time.

1. *Journals.* Participants can use their journals to record how they actually spend their time during an average day or week. Tabulating each woman's data on a graph can make the time distribution stand out very clearly.

2. *Things I Like to Do.* This exercise is described in *Values Clarification.*[32] When the women compare the list of things they like to do with the list of things they actually do (from the preceding journal exercise), they begin to wonder how they can spend more time doing the things they like to do.

3. *Time Lines.* Many women live strictly from day to day. This exercise, described in *The New England Women's Yellow Pages,*[30] can help women start to plan their lives, to think in terms of years instead of days. The exercise will not make women suddenly comfortable with long-range planning, but it can be a

beginning. Doing the exercise and talking about it afterward may also help women get a better perspective on their lives to date. For some, "Time Lines" may be an emotional exercise.

Women have differing views about time. Some may feel "stretched too thin," unable to find time to do the things they want to do, because they can't say no to the requests others make of them. Other women may have "time on their hands," yet be unable to take the initiative to get involved in activities that might interest them. Women who want to make better use of their time may realize that first they must learn to be more assertive.

Topic Nine: Assertiveness

Women tend to hold things in, to hide their real feelings. Many women learned as children that it's not "ladylike" to express anger and that it's "forward" to ask for what they want.

The inability to be assertive is often a major issue for women. They may try to justify their silences, their habit of keeping it all in, by saying, "I don't want to make trouble," or "I don't want to rock the boat," or "Of course, I *couldn't* say anything." At the same time, they may admit, "I'd like to tell them off," or "It just builds up inside until I think I'm going to explode," or "I cry a lot." Women need to identify the kinds of situations that elicit these feelings and to learn how to deal with them more directly and more honestly.

Many women permit others an excessive amount of control over their lives. These women need to be reassured that it's OK for them to consider their own wants and needs as well as everyone else's. Considering that they, too, have rights can be enlightening.

1. *The Right to Be Me.* This handout, adapted from Joanne Chickering's *Women Helping Women: Confidence Building for Livingroom Groups,*[24] is included below and may have a strong impact on some women, perhaps opening up new possibilities for them.

Many women have particular trouble refusing requests. Role-playing exercises (see Resources section on assertiveness) and handouts can all be used to supplement the discussion as participants learn to evaluate others' requests, to say no as well as yes.

2. *Journals.* Participants can use their journals to record the times during the week when they fail to say what's on their mind and to recreate what they might have said during such times. Or they may use their journals to compose "unsent letters" to people they are hesitant to address directly—to express anger, disappointment, affection, or gratitude. Also, they might record their successes, no matter how small, as they attempt to act more assertively. It is important that the women have the opportunity to discuss their progress week by week. Group support and encouragement are essential.

Learning to express feelings, desires, and needs directly is liberating for women. They find themselves feeling better and stronger, dealing with situations as they arise instead of harboring resentments, taking a healthier, more honest approach to living, and assuming more responsibility for their own lives.

Topic Ten: Bringing the Group to an End

If a group is not planning to continue indefinitely, it is important to discuss in advance the termination of the group. The leader and group members should all be aware from the outset of how many sessions there will be and, as the group goes along, of how many sessions are left. For some of the women the discussion group itself may become a major source of support, and this makes it crucial for the leader to help the women prepare for the ending of the group.

As the final session draws closer, it is important for the participants to discuss their feelings about the group. A final evaluation can be useful, not only to provide feedback to the leader, but also to help the women examine their group experience, think about what they have accomplished, and identify directions for future growth.

The group members may want to implement some means of keeping in touch, such as a newsletter or round-robin, after the group ends. It may be useful for the leader to provide an easy way for them to exchange addresses and phone numbers. The group might also want to explore mechanisms for resuming the course at a later date. The leader could furnish "certificates of completion" to enhance a sense of accomplishment. Such certificates might also be of help to participants who wish to transfer their group experience into life-experience credits at a local community college.

It's important for the leader to keep the discussion fairly light during the last session to make it easier for the participants to leave the group. She might wish to provide some time for a discussion about everyone's plans for the future. This can be a beneficial way of tying up loose ends and helping the participants say good-bye.

CONCLUSION

The leader should not expect women to feel radically different after participating in a course of this kind, but there will be some changes. The group experience itself, the sharing and the support both given and received, will be important to the women. For many, the realization that they are not alone—that other women have similar problems and concerns—will be an immense relief. As the women start to feel better about themselves, they may gain the confidence to look at their lives more critically and to detect and address underlying problems. In addition, they may begin to realize that they are more than care givers; that they, too, are individuals who matter. And, instead of feeling trapped by the circumstances of their lives, they may begin to feel hopeful about the future and the changes *they* can bring to it. As one participant said, "This course gives me the courage to *try* where I might have backed down before."

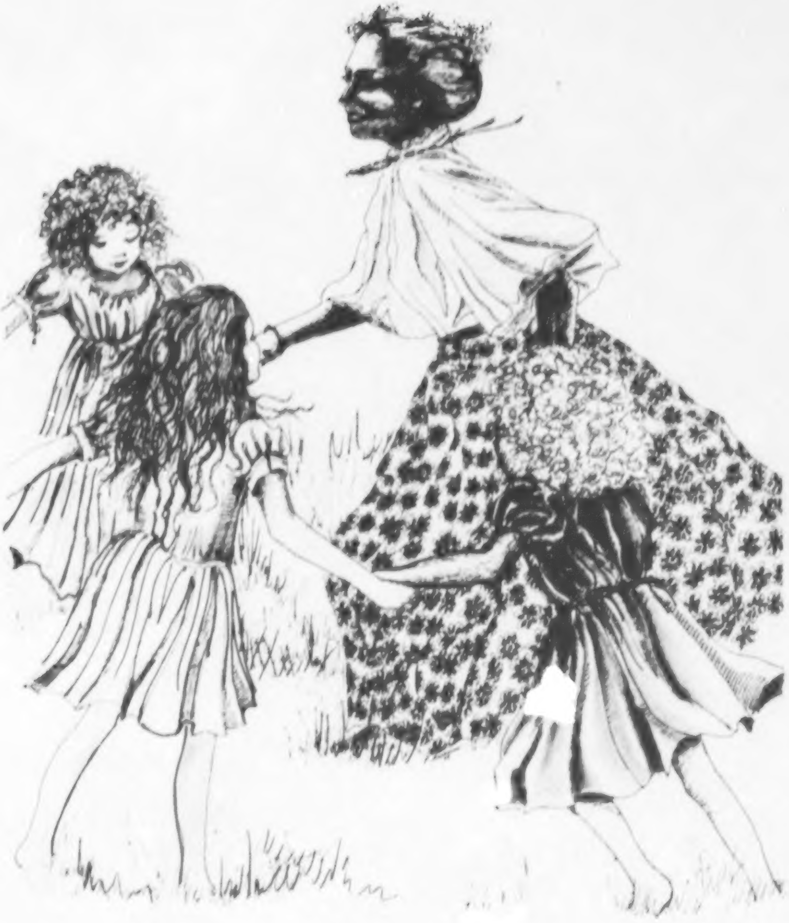
THE RIGHT TO BE ME*

I have the right to:	*This frees me from:*
• Express my own feelings and allow others to feel differently	• Expecting others to read my mind and trying to read the minds of others
• Express my own opinions and allow others to disagree without taking it personally	• Letting others put me in boxes
• Make a mistake and allow others to make mistakes without holding it against them	• Needing to have everyone approve of my behavior
• Refuse requests without feeling guilty or selfish	• Doing things begrudgingly
• Ask for what I want and not feel hurt or angry if refused	• Waiting for things to go my way
• Accept responsibility for my decisions and actions	• Depending upon others to take care of me
• Learn and grow, express my talents and develop my potential	

Add others as you think of them.

---

*This material is taken from *Women Helping Women: Confidence Building for Living-room Groups*, a publication of the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, 126 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05062. It is used with the Commission's permission, and is limited to reproduction of materials by nonprofit organizations for educational/training events. It does not include reproduction for sale or large-scale distribution.



RESOURCES

THE MOTHERING EXPERIENCE

1. Barber, Virginia, and Merrill Maguire Skaggs. *The Mother Person*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975.
2. Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Ourselves and Our Children: A Book by and for Parents*. New York: Random House, 1978.

   This book is full of first-person accounts. Chapter Nine, "Helping Ourselves and Finding Help," in particular, is an excellent resource for leaders and participants alike.
3. Lazarre, Jane. *The Mother Knot*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
4. Radl, Shirley. *Mother's Day Is Over*. New York: Warner, 1974.
5. Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1976.

PARENTING

The following books all stress how to encourage children to develop into responsible, independent people. In the specifics of how to handle given situations, the approach sometimes differs from book to book.

6. Dinkmeyer, Don, and Gary D. McKay. *Raising a Responsible Child: Practical Steps to Successful Family Relationships*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
7. Dreikurs, Rudolf, and Vicki Soltz. *Children: The Challenge*. New York: Hawthorne, 1964.

   Emphasizes specific courses of action—in particular, the use of logical consequences. Includes a good description of family constellations (pp. 20–32).
8. Faber, Adele, and Elaine Mazlish. *Liberated Parents, Liberated Children*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974.

   The authors describe the struggles and successes of mothers in a group led by Haim Ginott as they try to put Ginott's methods (see #9, below) into practice.
9. Ginott, Haim G. *Between Parent and Child*. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

   Excellent on learning to communicate effectively with one's children. However, some sections, especially with regard to sex roles, are dated.
10. ___________. *Between Parent and Teenager*. New York: Macmillan, 1969.

    Presents Dr. Ginott's theories as they relate to parenting teenagers.

11. Gordon, Thomas. *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Tested New Way to Raise Responsible Children.* New York: New American Library, 1975.

    Especially good on developing listening skills. Presents the "no-lose" method of resolving conflicts with one's children.

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN BETTER

12. Ames, Louise Bates, et al. *The Gesell Institute's Child from One to Six: Evaluating the Behavior of the Preschool Child.* New York: Harper and Row, 1979.

    A good source for information on "Ages and Stages."

13. Brazelton, T. Berry. *Infants and Mothers: Differences in Development.* New York: Delacorte, 1969.

    Demonstrates that children, starting at birth, influence—and are not just influenced by—those around them.

14. Caplan, Frank, ed. *The First Twelve Months of Life.* New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973.

    A month-by-month description taking into account individual differences among babies.

15. Elkind, D. *A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child: Birth to Sixteen.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1974.

16. Fraiberg, Selma. *The Magic Years.* New York: Scribner's, 1968.

17. Public Affairs Pamphlets, 381 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016.

    Low-cost literature on child development and parenting which can be used as handouts.

18. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. More low-cost literature available by writing Children's Bureau, Office of Child Development, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201.

NON-SEXIST CHILD REARING

19. Carmichael, Carrie. *Non-Sexist Childraising.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1977.

20. Nonsexist Child Development Project. Literature available from the Women's Action Alliance, Inc., 370 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

21. Pogrebin, Letty Cottin. "Nonsexist Childrearing: An Examination into Parenthood," in *The New England Women's Yellow Pages: Original Sourcebook for Women,* Fourth Edition. Carol Edry and Rosalyn Gerstein, eds. Boston: The Public Works, Inc., 1978.

22. Sprung, Barbara. *Non-Sexist Education for Young Children: A Practical Guide.* New York: Citation Press, 1975. Order from: Women's Action Alliance, Inc., 370 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

ASSERTIVENESS

23. Butler, Pamela E. *Self-Assertion for Women: A Guide to Becoming Androgynous.* New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

    Clearly written, with many case studies and some exercises.

24. Chickering, Joanne. *Women Helping Women: Confidence Building for Living-room Groups.* Vermont Governor's Commission on the Status of Women. Available from the Commission, 126 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05602.

25. Jongeward, Dorothy, and Dru Scott. *Women as Winners: Transactional Analysis for Personal Growth.* Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1976.

26. "The New Assertive Woman," in *Family Circle,* November 1975.

    A good, brief introduction to assertiveness.

27. Phelps, Stanlee, and Nancy Austin. *The Assertive Woman.* Pleasant Hills, California: Impact Publishers, Inc., 1975.

RELAXATION

28. DelliQuadri, Lyn, and Kati Breckenridge. *Mother Care: Helping Yourself through the Physical and Emotional Transition of New Motherhood.* Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1978.

    Several good relaxation techniques are described.

29. Hendricks, Gay, and Russel Wills. *The Centering Book.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975.

    The relaxation exercises in Chapter Four are designed for school children but can be easily adapted.

DESCRIPTIONS OF EXERCISES

30. Onorato, Jeanne. "Taking Stock," in *The New England Women's Yellow Pages: Original Sourcebook for Women,* Fourth Edition. Carol Edry and Rosalyn Gerstein, eds. Boston: The Public Works, Inc., 1978.

31. Satir, Virginia. "Family Sculptures," in *Peoplemaking.* Palo Alto, California: Science and Behavior, 1972.

32. Simon, Sidney, et al. "Things I Like to Do," in *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students.* New York: Hart, 1972.

LEADING A DISCUSSION GROUP

33. Gates, Barbara; Susan Klaw; and Adria Steinberg. *Changing Learning, Changing Lives: A High School Women's Studies Curriculum from the Group School.* Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979.

    Unit V has some good observations and suggestions for inexperienced group leaders.

34. Soltz, Vicki. *Study Group Leader's Manual* (to be used with *Children: The Challenge;* see #7, above). Chicago: Alfred Adler Institute of Chicago, 1967. Available from the Institute, 110 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60603.

    The first two chapters may provide some helpful suggestions for a novice group leader if allowances are made for the differences between a study group and a discussion/support group.

FILMS

35. *Barb: Breaking the Cycle of Child Abuse.* 16 mm, color, 28 minutes. Motorola TelePrograms, 4825 North Scott Street, Suite 26, Schiller Park, Illinois 60176, 1977.

    A powerful, though uneven, film. Parts of an insipid re-enactment of police and agency intervention in a child-abuse case are interspersed with real-life experiences as admitted child abusers talk with a counselor about their own childhoods. Powerful, especially when shown to women who have had similar experiences. Previewing is a *must;* use with care.

36. *Can a Parent Be Human?* 16 mm, color, 12 minutes. Churchill Films, 662 North Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90069, 1970.

    A discussion by a group of teenagers, focusing on the father-son relationship. Includes a role play at the end.

37. *Children's Aggression. Its Origin and Control.* 16 mm, color, 17 minutes. Sterling Educational Films, 241 East 34th Street, New York, New York 10016, 1974.

    A film designed for child care providers. At some points the "teachers" are shown doing the "wrong" things; participants found this film confusing.

38. *A Day in the Life of Bonnie Consolo.* 16 mm, color, 16½ minutes. Barry Spinello, producer. Baker Films, P.O. Box 5667, Pasadena, California 91107, 1976.

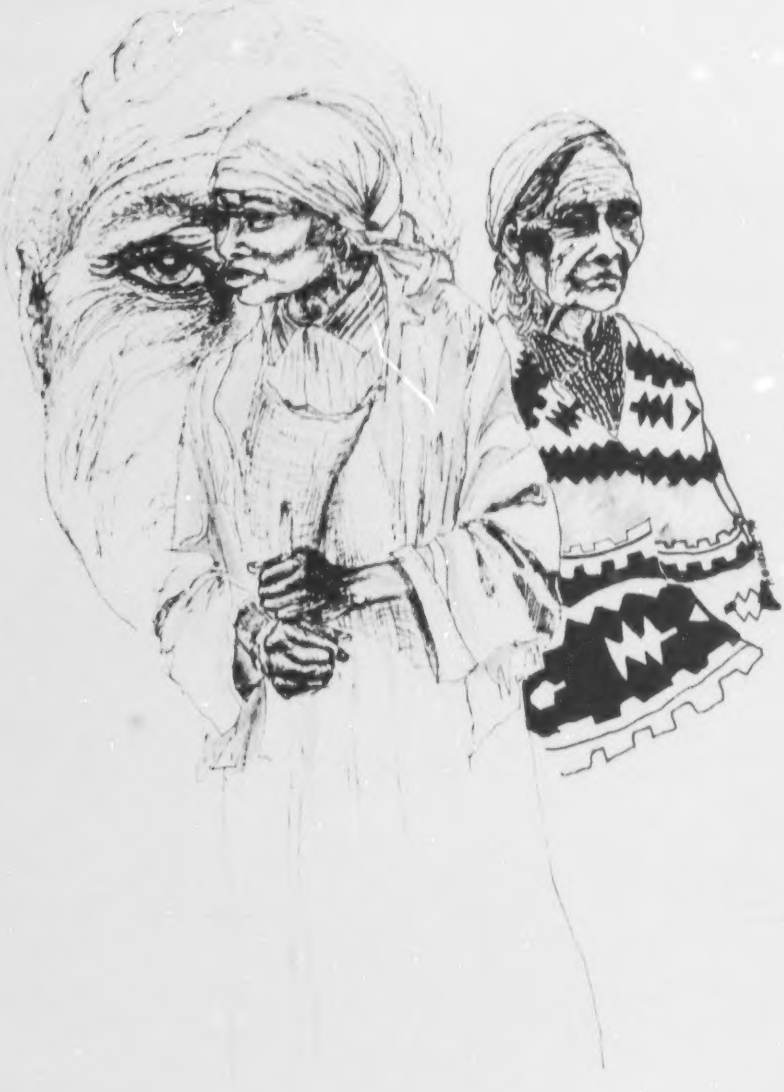
    A film showing the resourcefulness and courage of a woman born without arms. Because a participant had recently begun to suspect that her child might be retarded, the film was used to emphasize the importance of encouraging children to develop to their maximum potential.

39. *Sylvia, Fran, and Joy.* 16 mm, black and white, 25 minutes. Barry Spinello, producer. Churchill Films, 662 North Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90069, 1973.

    Depicts three women leading very different lives. Excellent for stimulating discussion on women's roles. Participants in these workshops were impressed by the honesty and bluntness of one woman in the movie, who talks about having hated her son when he was a baby.

40. *To Be a Woman.* 16 mm, color, 14 minutes. Billy Budd Films, 235 East 57th Street, New York, New York 10022, 1970.

Depicts young women in carefree situations. A superficial treatment, and dated; however, for some participants, it sparked an awareness that being a woman can be something special.



4. ORAL HISTORY AS A GROUP PROCESS

Christina Johnston

When people hear the term "oral history," they often visualize one person with a tape recorder interviewing another person. The process of oral history I present here is a group activity. We women sit around a tape recorder in a comfortable circle, talking about life experiences we have identified as interesting to us and valuable for others to hear about. We transcribe and publish our materials as part of this process. We use oral history as a vehicle to rediscover ourselves and learn about each other, and to create bonds of friendship and support within our group. We use it as a means to record and celebrate women's essential contributions to life, contributions unheralded by traditional written history, which tends to focus on big events and famous white men. Through the process of oral history, we begin to understand that our life experience is an important resource, not only to us as we continue to live our lives, but to other people as well.

As part of the Women's Community Studies program, I worked within two distinctly different groups of elder women. One was part of an ongoing, self-education group called Builders for Tomorrow. These women all live in their own homes. The other group was composed of residents in a nursing home.

I chose to work with elders because oral history makes sense to them as a process. They have experience to relate that can be valuable to following generations, and that might be lost if not recorded now. Also, as elders enter (for some) more reflective times, oral history can provide a way of summing up and reaching self-understanding important to living and dying positively. Obviously, younger people can also take part in their oral history with benefit to themselves as well as others, but the lack of urgency sometimes works against their beginning the process. Without undercutting oral history's significance as a means of growth for all ages, I want to emphasize that it is eminently accessible to elders, whereas the other units of study offered in our guide may not be so easy to broach successfully with them. In the extreme, for senile persons none of our other units are accessible at all, and yet oral history can tap into their inner-space travels when otherwise their journeys can be unbearably lonely. Oral history is not the only possible focus for developing a strong experience with elder women, but I believe it's an excellent starting point.

I'd like to discuss in detail the two groups I met with, because the points of description are at once common to many rural women and important to the func-

---

Christina Johnston *has lived in Vermont for the past ten years and is the mother of a young daughter. She has been involved in educational concerns of several different groups, including the developmentally disabled, teenagers, teachers, senior citizens, and adult women. For the past seven years, she has been exploring the use of oral history as an educational tool.*

(*Note:* In this chapter, superscript numerals refer to a particular reference, correspondingly numbered, in the Resources section, pp 97–101.)

tioning of the groups. Moreover, the very difference between the two groups speaks to the absolute necessity on our part as teachers to be in tune with the particular people involved, not just in planning the overall program and its sessions, but in our moment-to-moment response to the individual and group mood, capacity, and need.

The members of the Builders for Tomorrow who attended the oral history sessions were twenty-two strong women, ages sixty-five to eighty-seven, presently living in northern Vermont. The single most significant shared characteristic is that they all live independently, i.e., not in nursing homes, and thus feel a degree of autonomy in their lives. Four live in low-income apartments for elders; others live in their own homes, a few of these homes being multi-generational.

Five of the women live with husbands; the other seventeen are widowed. In fact, two of the five living with husbands have previously been widowed at least once. Some have been widowed more than forty years; others, a few months. At this point in history, experiencing the death of a spouse and weathering the resultant changes in our lives are situations all women face with greater probability than men. The possibility or actuality of widowhood is one of the reasons the bonds created by our women's oral history group are so appropriate and welcomed. All of us know loneliness on different levels; it seems that the potential for it increases as we age and our generation diminishes.

All of the women are active, and they articulate activity and purpose as a source of their mental and physical health. All of them are involved in house care; all share meals regularly at senior nutrition sites; most are involved and have been for a long time in service organizations; several garden and preserve foods, practice various handicrafts, and are responsible for the care of an extended family, e.g., a grandchild or an ailing brother; a few are employed.

A number of the women seem to embrace change. This seems, upon observation, to be related to the frequency of change in earlier life, especially geographic moves. All of them have experienced truly incredible change just by living as long as they have in this century.

Another common characteristic is having religious faith. The women don't all ascribe to the same faith, don't all attend services, but do share a confidence in powers and reasons beyond human experience. This faith has, by their admission, helped them through hard times.

The influence of religion needs to be assessed as part of any women's study group, because of the masculine orientation of the religions we generally encounter in our culture. Understanding how deeply ingrained this orientation is can be important to you, if you do not share it, in tempering your questions and expectations for major change in the women's sex-role definitions.

The women's religious background also reinforces a characteristic more common to elders than I've witnessed in my generation. (I'm thirty-four), and that is the sense that whatever happens has to happen. Whatever role you play as child/woman/person is the role you have to play. This doesn't mean there aren't frustration, anger, and boredom in filling prescribed roles, but there is an overall *acceptance*. This acceptance is internalized enough so that the women do feel satisfaction with their lives. In fact, when we talk about the increase of choice in women's lives today, the elder women are quick to see the potential insecurity and pain this new flexibility creates. As a group leader, you need to be sensitive to this position of acceptance, because, as interesting and energizing as it is to share frustrations about roles, it's important, particularly with elders, not to leave the women with a sense of embitterment about how they've lived sixty to eighty years of life. I mention this not only for their sake, but for yours, too. You may become frustrated with the group if its members never articulate what you perceive as justifiable anger with limitations placed on their lives. Women of different generations and/or socioeconomic backgrounds value acceptance differently according to what survival dictates. Our personal struggles as women at this point in time may not be relevant to women of other generations, even though the issues have remained the same. The women simply may not hear or comprehend our concerns, just as we may have trouble not rejecting acceptance as a way of life.

Another situation in which acceptance dominates the picture is people's, perhaps particularly women's, relationships to the government and to other services upon which they feel dependent, and which, of course, are traditionally male-dominated. The problem is that we especially rural people who were raised in smaller, slower, more intimate social-political structures feel out of control of governmental bureaucracy and are reluctant to harness it, clarify needs, and make demands of it. The reluctance is reinforced by the way of being that accepts conditions as they are. There is an acceptance that politicians, insurance salespersons, doctors, et al. know what we need better than we ourselves do. Here, however, the strength of oral history as a tool of learning, rather than just recording, becomes brilliantly apparent. By each of us telling our stories and listening to others we can reacquaint ourselves with "us" and witness our resiliency, imagination, and effectiveness as individuals in the face of today's complex structures. If we're looking at life in the past, we can begin to pinpoint what worked in those days but is lacking now, and make an effort to reintegrate these practices into our lives. The movement from simple story sharing to social action can't be expected within a short program of study. I've been working with Builders for three full years now, and the potential for social action is just dawning for me and, I hope, for them, so don't get frustrated. The beauty of women reowning their past and feeling "family" toward one another because the reowning has been a shared process is miracle enough. If all of you stick with it, though, the potency of a group may become formidable, as the sense of self and of the group increases.

A last characteristic common to many farm women is that they have shared far more work with men than their urban counterparts have. There were divisions of labor; women more often than not tended to do the cooking, washing, and child care. But these tasks were not entirely foreign to the men. After all, the men did not go away to work, a factor particularly important in child rearing. Additionally, women milked cows, hayed, shoveled manure, slaughtered hens, brought in the wood, etc., alongside men. Because the family livelihood was the farm and everyone stayed right there, men and women alike did what work had to be done and the opportunity for sharing was maximized. The competencies thus gained and the sense of pride in shared work done well have added to the women's sense of well-being.

With all these characteristics in mind, it is also useful to look at those aspects of the Builders for Tomorrow program which provided a sound educational base for the women's group.

As mentioned, all twenty-two women who worked together on women's oral history are members of the larger Builders group. Builders is a sixty-member, mixed-sex, self-education group that has existed since 1976. A major focus of the Builders has been oral history, so the women's class was not an isolated experience, but could be seen by all as a new source of strength related to our ongoing program. Avenues opened for us by our discussions may be traveled and expanded upon by the larger group.

I've been actively involved in Builders since its inception, a key factor in the level of trust and the sense of continuity demonstrated by this group. To my mind, long-term involvement is ideal but, of course, not always possible. When it's not, look for a person in the group who's capable of supporting and continuing work begun, and help her attain the necessary resources and skills to do so.

When the women's class began, the Builders had already embarked on a program of printing, once a month, thirty roughly edited pages of its oral history transcriptions to share with the public. The women's material has been printed right along with this, so what was generated in the women's class was never seen as material simply unto us, but was collected with an end purpose in mind. (See the sample transcription that follows.) I can't emphasize enough the value of having a *product built into the process* of a course—a real product that has value to the universe. Working toward a product provides a clear goal, nurtures the view of ourselves as resources, opens up possibilities of developing new skills, and provides opportunities for deepening friendships through working together. The finished product gives us something concrete to evaluate, and, as we share it with others, becomes a source of immeasurable pride and new energy.

The members of Builders come from a rather extended geographic area, some traveling forty to fifty miles to attend a meeting. I see some important results of this geographic spread that could be achieved in other ways and that are worth building into your group process. Several of the women who live close to each other are in other groups together, go to the same meal sites, and experience many of the same activities; but a lot of them don't talk much to each other beyond social chitchat. Patterns of non-relating and privacy are pretty well maintained. What happens when you mix outsiders inside is that new constellations of people and new discussions are encouraged. It turned out that some women who now live far apart used to go to school together; one lady knew right where another was born when she herself didn't even know; two women have struck up a brand new friendship as delicate and total as any I've had the joy to watch flourish. There are certainly advantages to working within established groups whose members find it physically easy to gather, but it's important to be able to forge fresh relationships within them. Dividing the larger group into smaller, task-oriented groups in various ways, asking each member to bring a friend, may provide the base group with ample room for change, without adding the problem of transportation.

The very last thing to mention is that we had a good, quiet, private place to meet, in a church classroom across from an accessible senior meal site. The importance of such a simple thing is beyond words.

The second group—the intensity of the experience and the stark contrast to my first group. These people live in a nursing home. They are dependent. They have no privacy. They have no power. In many cases, they have no context. A few are extremely and consistently lucid, meaning they live in a reality recognizable to me. They seem the saddest. A few live very articulately in strictly personal realities. Still more seem to straddle the lines of various realities simultaneously. Some no longer communicate. Or do they?

Much of what I have written about the women of Builders for Tomorrow applies to the lucid women in the nursing home and probably used to apply to many of the other women before senility set in. But anything you learn about the residents is overwhelmed by one fact: they live in isolation. The most coherent woman describes her life in three stages—one, living in Europe; two, returning to the United States and her career; three, marrying and moving to Vermont. The fourth, entering a nursing home, does not count as part of life.

I've done a lot of writing since I started going to the nursing home and I'd like to go on and on here as I seek understanding through words, but what I need to say is that, as complex as the situation is, as difficult as communication is, oral history can become the vehicle for priming long untouched wells and replenishing them. Uprooted people without family and familiar surroundings can remember and describe their childhood bedroom—its color, its furniture, even a hiding place for treasured books—if they're asked and then *listened to*. The oral history sessions turn out to provide a time in which a lot of the floating images and startling insights can be caught and shared, not just with me, but with some of the staff and, most beautifully of all, with other residents.

This last point is extremely important. It seems that with extreme age, one of the things you lose energy and capacity for, no matter how you long for it, is initiating and sustaining conversation. Imagine that there is a person you feel drawn to, but you are blind and she is deaf. Neither of you really registers those obstacles. You both are in wheelchairs you can't move by yourself. The nurses may or may not place you close enough for communion. Neither of your minds stays clear enough to get beyond "hello," if they stay clear that long. Still, you are drawn. Usually you just sit until you're moved.

Now, what's happened through the oral history discussions is that you're provided with a topic that you and your friend and others maybe remember and think about, plus a discussion leader who can see, hear, and move. She can come over to you and touch you and call directly into your ear or fix you with her eyes, whatever it is that draws you forth, and she can wait, repeat, and relay your message to others. It's cumbersome but it works. Contact is made. Pleasure and intensity wash over the too-frequent, seeping blankness. A support group in its simplest form!

As I write, I recognize that many of you reading this won't be working in a nursing home, although it's a particularly appropriate setting for women's studies, because women residents far outnumber men; because the nurses are predominantly women; because the doctors, managers, and owners are predominantly men; and because, I think, mothers are probably placed far more readily by children in nursing homes than fathers are. However, even if you're not working in a nursing home, I think the very extremity of the teaching situation is valuable to look at. Despite having taught junior high for seven years and often having had an overdose of students who had no desire or reason to be in school, I never had to face quite as clearly the following dictates of teaching. All of them I've understood before; they just acquired sledgehammer impact in the nursing home setting.

Foremost is that you can't go into a new situation with a few evocative sessions and leave. It isn't appropriate in any situation. Everyone needs orienting time and trust-building time, more so in institutions where programs are continually introduced and withdrawn before fruit can even set, let alone ripen. Add to that an older person's common, personal, day-to-day disorientation and a changed sense of time, and the flash-in-the-pan course is probably better left at home.

Next, discussions need at least one *active* facilitator—not necessarily as physically active as I've described in the nursing home (I do sit still in the Builders' discussions most of the time), but active in listening, questioning, helping connections to be made, etc.

Learn names immediately. Everyone knows that as a matter of respect, but I'd never really registered before how much control resides in knowing names. The person who remains nameless in a group maintains considerable control, because without a name, there may be no way you can elicit or curtail her participation. This thought came crystal clear to me during the first session, when a blind woman, her name unknown to me at the time, consistently interrupted and talked over less aggressive and less coherent participants. Once I knew her name and could quickly get her attention by calling it out, she backed off willingly. She didn't mean to dominate; she just lacked the visual cues that she was doing so. Knowing her name gave me the simplest of tools to make direct contact.

As hard as it is, you shouldn't make any assumptions about what a person can't or won't do. She probably can and will. Dorothy sits slumped forward in her chair, nearly mute, trying to eat a plant or a cassette case, apparently blind. Dismiss. Ah! But she's not just mouth-and-stomach hungry. By chance, I discover she's thoughtexchange hungry. She wants to talk. Some images flow easily, others are a strain to harness into words, but even opinions are forming and they want to be heard. My experience with Dorothy brings back memories of other instances when I (the teacher?) have assumed an inability or unwillingness on a student's part and thereby have limited the potential learning. That's teaching? It happens all the time.

It is important to have a vision, goals, and plans as a teacher. That's what it's all about—you believing enough in yourself and your ideas and knowledge to want to share with others, in the hope that their lives will be changed and enriched. By the same token, it's essential to remain open to the possibility that you have as much to learn in any situation as anyone else involved does, that your painstaking plans may have to be dumped in the first few minutes of the first session and possibly in the second session too, and that's *okay*. As I traveled to my first class at the nursing home, I carried with me the fear that I was covering old ground, that working with another group of elder women didn't offer enough variance to really test my ideas, and so on. Of course, the minute I began, my mind was blown and my planning vanished, as I realized my entire concern had been for me and not for the individual participants and all their glorious differences.

Last, a dictate more specifically of oral history than teaching, laid bare by a nursing home resident. It concerns what I call the "rape" aspect of oral history: dredging up and taking information from people that they don't want to release or even think about. I try always to be aware of, and careful not to perpetrate, such a violation, although this problem sometimes is greater when I do have an end product in mind. Jessie brought it home to me bluntly, though, when she said, her body snapping tension: "I don't *want* to remember. If I think about the past, I get too lonely. To have any happiness here [at the nursing home] at all, I must live in the present." You do, of course, have to try to read beyond the words and sense whether Jessie is, in fact, asking to talk about the past, but always, always ask yourself: "Why am I doing this? For Jessie? For me? Is the stimulation positive or does it lead to a reality not wanted?"

All pretty obvious, right? In some situations I've "gotten away with" (I thought) sort of half believingacting on these, but not in the nursing home.

You never do.

As you begin planning your own oral history program, the main thing you need to do is think about questions. For the last year the question I've used to get myself started and organized is, "What events and activities are shared by all humans?" "Birth and death. Eating. Sleeping. Relationships. Sex. Learning. Work? Aging . . ." I also ask about particular groups, "What historical events have they shared?" "The wars. The Depression." In Vermont, "the Flood of 1927." And so on. Then I begin formulating as many questions relating to my answers as I can. I do this on my own. I do it by talking to people, asking them how they'd ask a question. For example, I wanted to ask, "What kind of contraception did you use?" Someone suggested the alternative of inquiring about "family planning." Before I began the classes with the Builders, I sat down with a few of its members, attempted to explain what the Women's Community Studies project proposed to do, and asked what they as a group of women would like to talk about. As they answered, I wrote their statements as questions and then organized those around my two beginning questions about shared human and historical events. I continued developing questions during the classes themselves, mostly by *listening closely to answers* and encouraging everyone in the class to do the same.

Listening is the key to the oral history process. Sometimes, because tape recorders are used, people slacken their attention and leave the listening to machines. However, in my experience most questions asked in any valid oral history situation are not pre-planned, but spring out of the discussion itself. My "rule of ear" is to listen so closely that I know the moment I've stopped understanding. New questions are born in these moments.

No matter how intent your listening is during a session, it's also very useful to listen between sessions to the tapes produced. Not only does this afford you an opportunity to evaluate the session, but more questions may surface as you listen that did not occur to you at the time of the discussion.

It is wise to avoid looking at lists of other people's questions at the beginning of your question-building process. One reason is that no two people ask the same questions about a given topic. If we're using oral history as a way of extending human understanding, the wider the range of questions the better. Another reason I don't use borrowed lists is that I still get trapped by other people's questions when I incorporate them into a discussion. As an example, the first question I asked in the Builder's session about women and work was a borrowed one. "What do you consider to be your most important work?" Right away a participant sought a definition of "important." Now, I hadn't thought about that. The problem was by no means drastic, but the incident demonstrates the risks of using other people's questions. Simply ask what *you* want to know and, again, encourage everyone in the group to do the same.

The nursing home residents made me think about my questions far more carefully than I ever had before. What I thought about applied, of course, to all oral history situations. With the nursing home residents, specific questions are often the most helpful—not just, "What was your bedroom like?" but "What color was your bedroom?" "What pieces of furniture were in it?" "What kind of light?" "Whom did you share your bedroom with?" "Was it a place you liked being in?" I've even begun saying, "Close your eyes and visualize. . ." I am also interested in trying deep-breathing exercises before sessions, as an increased oxygen supply to the brain often aids the use of memory.

I also discovered two tendencies I have in my questioning that cause problems. One is to preface questions with "Can you remember. . .?" Asking that makes it easy for people to say, "No, I can't." I think they can remember more often if you don't suggest to them that they can't. The other tendency, which is more subtle, but perhaps more devastating and more difficult to separate from the oral history process, is to imply that the past has more importance than the present: "What *were* the happy times in your life?" "What *were* the sad times?" These questions preclude the possibility that people are happy or sad *now*. Better to ask: "What do you consider to be the happy times in your life? What do you consider to be the sad times?"

You'll probably have to act as discussion leader, but it helps the whole process if you also view yourself as a participant, actively giving information as well as gathering it. It's important to think about how you would answer all the questions you dream up. You probably won't have to answer all of them in the class, but it does help you to identify with the group if you put yourself in the participants' position, and sometimes, of course, they will ask you. Other times, disclosure on your part will be needed to establish enough trust to move on. Related to this is not being afraid to ask particular questions. I used to explain my hesitancy to ask certain questions as protection of the participants, but now I think more often than not it's because I'm not sure of my own answer. As long as it's clear that no one has to answer anything she doesn't want to, pretty much anything can be asked.

The classes themselves. As I mentioned earlier, in both settings we use oral history as a group activity, rather than as one-on-one interviewing, and we transcribe our taped material and try to get it into print. In both settings we *always* use a tape recorder. Everyone knows it. Everyone also knows it can be turned off any time she'd like and that nothing will be done with any of the information without her permission.

The women from the Builders group met nine times, for roughly 2½ hours each time. Depending upon the flow of discussion, we either took a break or shared a snack at the end of the session. Participants took turns preparing the food, using old recipes learned from a mother or a grandmother. This ritual not only celebrated our "woman heritage," but provided for some of the widows in our group a chance to prepare food for others, a nurturing activity sorely missed by some in their day-to-day lives.

The first few sessions I called all the participants a couple of days before the meeting. Later on I called fewer of them and they relayed my reminder. Transportation was a constant complication and required my efforts as well as theirs to arrange every time. Our program provided transportation money, which I handed out during each session. This was essential.

At the first session I passed out small composition books to encourage written as well as oral history. A few of the women welcomed the opportunity.

The following is a skeletal layout of the Builders' nine sessions, excerpted from my journal entries. It's not offered as "the" way to do it, but as a way to help you visualize how things might flow. You should find reading "Women and Their Work," which includes part of the transcription of our first session, helpful, too. (It follows, at the end of this chapter.)

Session 1—We discussed *women and work,* beginning with the question, "What do you consider to be your most important work, defining work any way you want?" We went on to discuss divisions of labor in the household, work we did as children, work available to women, our mother's work, etc. We laughed a lot. We grumped about housework a lot. It was a good place to start. Everyone had worked, and so everyone had something to say. In addition, the topic has a neutral quality about it—it's not like jumping in and talking about death the first day.

Session 2—Continuation of *women and work.* More women came, so we began with the "important work" question. We tried to figure out what the different pressures were for them as women, and for their grandmothers, mothers, daughters, and granddaughters. A great discussion, but I neglected to push the "record" button. Thereafter, the recorder became a group responsibility.

Session 3—Planned to begin *personal histories* in order to give our other discussions more of a context, but I got bogged down trying to elicit more direction from participants for the overall course. I ended up talking a lot and discussion skipped all over without any digging in. Ended class with viewing and discussing *Yudie*[18] (see Resources) as a prelude to our own personal histories. The rural women had some trouble relating to Yudie as a person because she is urban and Jewish, but they liked the fact that the film was about an elder woman.

Session 4—*Personal histories.* Everyone tense. The process of each person telling her story was different from picking a topic and everyone pitching in, but it was inevitably beautiful and we all felt glad to have done it. Old connections rediscovered, new connections made. Lots of laughing, lots of empathy. After a break we viewed Appalshop's *Nature's Way*[17] about *home remedy* and *home birth.* Began discussion about both.

Session 5—*Home remedies, disease, home birth, and child rearing.* Hot day. Participants opted to sit in straight line that day "to keep cool," had trouble not talking all at once; thereafter, we made a point of sitting in a circle. The topics were all-consuming for everyone. Clearly, nurturance roles filled their lives.

Session 6—*Home remedies* remembered since last session shared. Began discussion of *periods of change in life* and got right into *death.* Lots of empathetic listening. (See text below for description of how topic of death evolved.)

Session 7—*Death*, continued. Moved into our own funeral planning needs. Watched Appalshop film, *Quilting Women*[17] (see Resources), and discussed quilting, working together, women's groups. Lackluster discussion. Despite the fact that all the women have taken part in women's activities and organizations, the topics did not engage them. Having worked with them in mixed-sex discussions, I've watched the women consistently defer to men, and yet, only a few ever articulated that it was important to meet in this oral history class as women only. They seem to have responded to their need to meet with women throughout their lives, but simply did not verbalize the need.

Session 8—*Care for elders*. Watched *Peege*[30] (see Resources), a dramatic film about a guilt-ridden family visiting their grandmother in a nursing home. Upon showing it to the Women's Community Studies staff, we all bawled. Nary a tear from the older women. Why? They chose not to identify with the grandmother, either out of fear or because most of them took care of their elders at home, in ways they feel comfortable about. Discussed this, discussed care of society's dependents in the past. Discussed senility. Began talking about selves and present housing. My nursing home experience, which I share with them regularly, served as a catalyst. Needs more time, but is another area, a crucial one, where oral history can lead into social action that may help them to close their lives in an acceptable setting. I noticed at the end of the session women touched each other more than is usual for them as they said farewell.

Session 9—A brief look at *women's history*—United States and Vermont—through a slide show[16] and a filmstrip[19] (see Resources). Everyone interested, unfamiliar with most of the names. Discussion indicated open-mindedness about women's changing roles, while at the same time they trusted tradition more, felt safer there. The influence of religion in defining roles was clear in the discussion.

All of the sessions leave hundreds of questions unanswered. We need more time. A whole new topic we need to consider is the image of elder women in our society. I'd actually planned it in, but we ended up talking about disease, death, and nursing homes in the last five sessions, and I thought it would be better to end on a positive note by celebrating women's historical progress.

I can't give you such a straightforward outline of the nursing home class. We talked about some of the same topics, but often I tried to plan a session around the weather or a holiday or a specific event. For example, on an early spring day, we sat outside and basked in the sun and talked about dandelion greens, climbing trees, and planting gardens (a ninety-two-year-old woman remembered back to barely escaping a frost in her garden when she was young and too pregnant to move much and her husband was away on a trip.) The day before the Fourth of July, we discussed how they used to celebrate. As Friday the Thirteenth approached, we had a great time swapping superstitions, revealing who taught them to us and how we tested them.

The second day I went to the nursing home, I took my small daughter's china doll to initiate a discussion of toys. The effect was magical as they passed the doll around, remembered, relived. On the basis of that, I've begun putting some kits of objects together (mostly loaned by the Builders) that might spark clarity: household utensils, clothes, farm tools, newspapers, records, toys. As I experiment with this idea, I'm learning that for some women objects that take them back to times when they were providers are very effective—for example, canning jars. While such kits might be particularly useful in this situation, they could be used as icebreakers with almost any group.

One intense day we began talking about the World Wars. At first the session followed straightforward lines—what the women were doing at the time, who went to war, etc. Then one of the women began crying softly, equating her son's leaving for war with his not visiting her now. Everyone in the group empathized and felt similarly stranded. Many cried. I'm in awe of the powerful connection made by this woman, a type of connection made frequently by the nursing home residents. Another day, another woman, who consciously chose not to have children, watched her death press near and wondered aloud what her life had meant: "Will people remember me? If I had children, there would at least be physical proof that I existed. Would that proof help me to release my unwanted life now?" I begin to see a whole new kind of material being elicited through oral history—*that which lays bare human principles of need,* rather than human interest anecdotes and details filling in the gaps of textbook history.

As I look at the two groups I identify three major educational goals. The first seems to me important in all teaching/learning situations and applied equally in both of my groups. That is for all of us to recognize ourselves as valuable resources, not only for ourselves, but for others. Oral history is particularly well suited to helping us achieve that goal. We did use some films, books, and objects to stimulate discussion, but we didn't accept them as authoritative. We need to counterbalance the historical trend in our society to look for and trust only in answers provided by so-called authorities, rather than trusting in our own experience and abilities to synthesize relevant answers. For the senile person, this goal might be better expressed as "re-encountering self."

Second, another goal oral history lends itself to easily is that of exchange and support. It doesn't seem to me our society spends much time nurturing communication skills or valuing them as necessary to mental health, so none of us is particularly adept. The problem is compounded by the fact that a lot of topics about which we might feel most inner tension and need for social support are those we have been taught are too private to talk about, shouldn't be imposed on others, are signs of weakness, etc.; an example is the topic of death. Sharing may become increasingly difficult for elders, not necessarily for lack of desire, but for logistical reasons, such as transportation, or because sharing is not an *articulated* need. That's where a scheduled discussion group, a facilitator, and oral history can fit in.

Let's look at how the oral history process assisted the development of exchange and support around the topic of death. Some were anxious to talk about death. Others clearly wanted *not* to talk about it—their body shifts told me, if their words didn't. What to do? Talk about death and alienate some, or vice versa? I waited and thought. I realized that everyone has experience with death and elders have had plenty—parents, children, spouses, friends—so the group could talk about it from a historical vantage. "What have your experiences with death been?" "What were funerals like?" "Who helped you most when your husband died?" "Did you have regrets about anything?" Such questions can be answered with the understanding that younger folks with less experience may be able to learn from the answers. This reason beyond self that oral history provides can be an important catalyst for discussion. The real beauty of this particular situation was that I still kept putting off the discussion for fear of losing some people, but it came about in its own time, anyway, on the day we decided to talk about periods of change in our lives. One woman talked about marriage, and then, boom! The next talked about a neighbor having died recently, and we were launched for about four hours, and all the "historical" questions were indeed useful in helping to include those who remained uneasy.

The third major goal is one which has only evolved recently for me and that I'm not sure makes sense in all situations—that of translating oral history discussions into forums for social change. To return to the topic of death, one of the questions was about funerals in the past. They were simpler and apparently far more satisfying and less expensive than modern funerals. What developed out of this recognition was the desire to incorporate our knowledge into planning our own funerals, learning about present legislation, and looking into a consumer protection group. The possibilities for tackling present problems with tried, satisfactory solutions are endless.

Of course, in addition to overall goals, I always like to develop goals (explicitly, whenever possible) with individual participants. Linnie wants to write about her teaching experience. Elspeth needs to tell her entire life story, as a possible means of coming to terms with her new "life" in a nursing home. I'd like Agnes to come to a meeting without arm-twisting (she seems to love coming). And so on. These individual goals act as a reinforcement of the individual links that form the group, as a way of my responding to participants' personal needs, and as a recognition that the impact of the group experience is, in the end, upon individuals.

Finally, as you embark on your journey, it may be helpful to think about Elizabeth Coatsworth's poem from *Personal Geography,*[24] written at age eighty-three.

Anyone can see at a glance
    that I am old.
I, I, alone do not see it.
When I look at myself in
    the mirror
I see the hundred selves,
even the child.

When I speak or act, anyone
    of them at all
may speak or act for me,
even the child.
Only of one thing I am sure:
when I dream
I am always ageless.*

If we can let all our Selves come forth and talk and dream together, our strength will be multiplied and the distance traveled stretched unbelievably.

---

*'Anyone can see at a glance that I am old,' from *Personal Geography* by Elizabeth Coatsworth. Copyright © 1976 by Elizabeth Coatsworth Beston. Reprinted by permission of The Stephen Greene Press, Brattleboro, Vermont.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT: WOMEN AND THEIR WORK

Most of the following information was generated by a group of Vermont women, ages 65–87, as part of an oral history class offered through the Women's Community Studies program. The women had all been involved in providing oral history for 3–4 years, through a group of men and women self-named Builders for Tomorrow and based in Morrisville, Vermont. This transcript represents the first opportunity taken by the women to meet and share solely as women and to record women's special contributions to sustaining life; the segment reprinted below represents only a portion of the first discussion session.

Women's Oral History Class #1, March 1979

CHRISTINA I thought a good place to start a question, taking the idea of women and work, being anything that you consider work. Maybe talking about what was the most important to you.

HANNAH The most pleasurable?

CHRISTINA Yes, the most pleasurable, the most interesting to you. However we define that "most important."

BETTY The most important work in my life was doing store work and bookkeeping, which I spent most of my life doing.

CHRISTINA And that was with Raymond [Betty's husband]?

BETTY Well, the store work was. But I have always kept books.

CHRISTINA And that was enjoyable to you?

BETTY Yes, it was. I have been a psychiatric nurse, when going to school, did housework and babysitting, also helped on the farm.

CHRISTINA Did you have educational background to do that? Did you go to school to do that?

BETTY Just high school. My personal experience in bookkeeping was to know the principles of bookkeeping and then adjust yourself to someone else's books. You don't do it the way you learned to do it in school. When I use to do income taxes, which I did for many years (something like forty-two years), people would bring a handful of papers and say, "Well, I am not a very good bookkeeper, but here's my expenses." And I'd say, "Do you understand them?" and they'd say, "Yes," and then I'd say, "That is all that is necessary, because I am going to ask you the questions." And I had no trouble. It is a matter of adjusting to their bookkeeping, no matter if it is a bunch of papers in their hands or a set of books.

HANNAH I think that the biggest job I ever had was raising a big family. It's challenging! It's enjoyable! It's a headache! It's work! From the first one to the youngest.

CHRISTINA A good deal of that time, you were by yourself, weren't you?

HANNAH Well, the youngest one was ten and the oldest was twenty-two, when my husband died. Eight were in school, and as I said, it was work, but it was a lot of fun and it still is. It is still a lot of headaches.

BETTY Hannah, how soon after your husband died did you come to Vermont to live?

HANNAH Almost immediately. He died in '62, and we came the next summer. But we had considered it before that, you know. We had intended originally to retire to Vermont. And he would have retired two years after he died.

MARY And you haven't been sorry?

HANNAH No. I go down once in awhile but I am glad to get back. Those that live in New York come once in awhile, but the ones who live here don't go down anymore. There was one grandchild when he died. There are twenty-nine now. So we keep busy.

IDA And it isn't just housekeeping either.

HANNAH Oh, no, it isn't. It's headkeeping, Ida.

IDA And nursing and everything.

HANNAH Oh, everything. Everything! And we now are about to embark on the fourth generation. And we will be kept busy. There's not a lot of money in it but—

IDA But a lot of living.

HANNAH There certainly is, Ida, there certainly is.

CHRISTINA Would you say that raising a family was important work to you, Ida? You didn't have any children?

HANNAH Being a schoolteacher, you have children, Christina.

IDA I had some nieces that I took care of. They take care of me now. Anything comes up, I know where I can get help.

CHRISTINA Good. You taught school?

IDA Fifteen years.

CHRISTINA Now where did you teach school?

IDA I taught in the little rural schools out in the country.

CHRISTINA Around Jeffersonville?

IDA Oh, yeah, mostly. Always in Vermont. From St. Johnsbury to Fairfield.

CHRISTINA Ida, did you consider teaching your most important work or are other kinds of work important to you?

IDA No, mostly housework and taking my share of the work and responsibility on the farm.

CHRISTINA That was your family farm?

IDA I use to put up as many as six hundred jars of fruit, vegetables, and meat a year. I don't say that every one of those were quarts, you know. Some of them were pints. Jellies, jams, and meat. I use to put up thirty quarts of beef. We would put it in hot water bath, and we had the most beautiful meat that you ever saw when you opened those, but now you can't do that.

BETTY I put up six quarts last week, but I did it by pressure cooker.

IDA I used just plain hot water.

BETTY When I started years ago, I used a hot water bath.

IDA We didn't lose any meat.

BETTY We didn't but I suppose we could all be dead, poisoned. [Laughter.] Well, it's the same thing you know—environment, all the things that the government tells us we can't eat, that we have eaten all our lives.

PEARL Yes, and we are still here, alive.

IDA We're still here after eight years! [Laughter.] Use to pick berries in the fields and bring them home. Digging dandelion greens and canning them.

MARY Or salting them down.

IDA I guess the biggest disappointment in my life—my neighbor told me to salt it instead of canning it. So I got a great big jar. You know what dandelions are. I had that full and every one of them spoiled.

MARY You didn't salt it right.

IDA I didn't hold my mouth right or something. Boy, that was a disappointment. Of couse, it was hours and hours of work to pick and clean them.

MARY We had some hens and we sold them (the eggs) for eleven cents a dozen, too. We lived on a farm. I taught for about eight years and we lived on a farm. We had about forty cows, young cattle. We had a sugar place and we had hens. We had about two hundred. They were away from the house and I had to lug water up there. I broke some ribs once, slipping down on the ice. We shipped them to Lanphear Brothers in Boston, which were some people who went from this town down there—some of Carroll Lanphear's relatives. We'd pack them in boxes and ship them on the train.

HANNAH Live, Mary?

MARY Just the eggs. No, but I use to dress off the chickens when Effie Smalley had her tearoom down to Stowe. I'd get up early in the morning and dress them off and send them by the milkman down there for her to use.

CHRISTINA Now, would you actually do the butchering?

MARY Oh, I have done it. I don't like to but I have.

IDA I have too.

MARY I've cut their heads off.

HANNAH Believe it or not, I was raised in New York City and I have done plenty of it.

BETTY The year that I was alone, I have butchered turkeys all alone.

LILLIE They're much bigger too.

BETTY They're a lot heavier but they smell better too. They smell enough, but nothing like a chicken.

LILLIE After anyone has done that, a chicken doesn't taste very good. It doesn't to me anyway.

PEARL I remember one time I had to hold the chicken on the chopping block while my brother cut the head off. What a time they had with me. Finally I did, but I was looking off this way and not where the chicken was.

MARY We use to have two nails driven in a block of wood and we would put their head in between and chop them off.

HANNAH My mother never chopped a head off a chicken.

MARY Did she stick them?

HANNAH She had some method of strangling them with [her] thumb which was much less cruel than chopping their head off. She would strangle them and then hang them upsidedown for a half an hour or so, and every drop of blood would go down into the head of the chicken, and then she would cut the head off. And she always plucked them dry. If you plucked them immediately, you could pluck them as clean as a whistle. It was a much, much easier way to do than chopping the head off. I never learned the knack of it. She learned it as a child in Ireland.

BETTY Did she hold that chicken until the blood ran down?

HANNAH No, no, no!

BETTY How could it do it after it was dead?

HANNAH She strangled the chicken some way and the wings would flutter, you know, and that sort of thing, and she knew by the fluttering when the chicken was dead. She hung it up and every bit of that blood had run through. You never saw a drop of blood. It was very clean—I haven't thought of it in a thousand years, you know.

ELLA We never cut chickens' heads off, or turkeys' either. Irving would take a sharp bladed knife and stick them.

BETTY I've stuck turkeys right in the roof of the mouth and they bleed out perfectly.

ELLA I've raised plenty of turkeys and chickens.

HANNAH My mother did—on the farm.

MARY Always flopping around.

BETTY That's one thing about turkeys, you didn't have that flopping around because if you did, they'd be so bruised that you couldn't eat them.

MARY No, but the hens would though. They'd fly and flop around with their heads cut off.

HANNAH Oh, we kids use to love to see the hens flop around.

LILLIE And lobsters. I thought it was such a cruel thing to drop a lobster into boiling water. I wouldn't eat one of those things.

PEARL I still think it is, but I do it.

LILLIE Well, a change of pace. This is Lillie. After my family was more or less grown up, I went to work in the greenhouse. I worked there for fifteen years in the greenhouse.

CHRISTINA Now where was that?

LILLIE This was on River Street. It is where the Daisy Patch is now. And when I went in I didn't know nothing about it, but you learned and you learned quick when you lost something as you started to grow. And one year, I raised, planted all the seed, transplanted over four thousand dozen, and I, also, when it came Memorial time, I had to make up the Memorial tubs. And I didn't know anything about it. Nobody showed me. I had to do it myself. I never had any help, only when it came time to sell these flowers and sell these pots. Mr. Brooks helped me. Made out the orders, but, of course, Mrs. Brooks worked in the shop. She left in the morning, came home and ate her dinner and was gone again in the afternoon. But it was always such a pleasure to start with a little seed and see it grow and bud and flourish. And see the different things, the colors. Very interesting.

CHRISTINA And that was the job that you really enjoyed.

LILLIE I really enjoyed it.

BETTY Speaking of seedlings, Raymond and I worked for the Soil Conservation one year and we planted forty thousand pine trees and spruce trees. That was a lot of fun.

CHRISTINA When was that?

BETTY Oh, back in 1958. We had a tractor and tobacco planter. I rode on the tobacco planter and dropped the little seedlings in the soil. We also had a third person to hand me the seedlings. You dropped them about eight feet apart. You got the rhythm so you knew just when to drop them. We planted all over Franklin County.

MARY We had some planted up on our land in Wolcott.

BETTY They are a lot above my head now. In fact, they are grown trees.

CHRISTINA Pearl, you were a nurse, weren't you?

PEARL I still am a nurse.

CHRISTINA You are. Now, is that what you really enjoyed as main work, or is there something else?

PEARL No, when I was a kid, I thought of being a teacher. That was the only thing that I dreamed about. But then it came along, and I started going into homes and taking care of sick people and that type of thing, and it just grew on me, and I was a practitioner for years and finally I got a license. So I am a licensed practical but I am not a registered nurse.

CHRISTINA How young were you when you started going into people's homes and taking care of the ill?

PEARL Oh, I would say sixteen or seventeen.

CHRISTINA So that was your first job and it became your life work?

PEARL Yes, and I am an old telephone operator, too—that and the nursing. By then it got so that the telephone operator was not so much fun, especially in the big offices where you had somebody breathing down your neck all the time.

BETTY Did you run the PBX board?

PEARL Yes.

BETTY I did too. It's a small telephone board, not like in a telephone office. But in a office.

PEARL I loved it in the small offices, for very often you worked alone. And anything came up, you didn't call the neighbors, but called the operator and said something like, "My little child has just gone out in the woods and I can't see him now. What am I going to do now?" And I'd say, "You just go where you saw him last." And then I would call the men out—the Emergency. The Emergency was to put in as many plugs (on the switchboard) as you could put in and then pull *one* great alarm at one time. You'd pull and pull, and when you thought everyone had time to get on the line, you'd say, "So and so just lost a little boy up in the woods."

CHRISTINA Well, see, you were really a crucial part of the community and you helped out that way.

PEARL Then you got into an office with a circuit of, say, even twenty-five, you weren't even allowed to say "good morning" to any of your—

HANNAH To remain impersonal.

PEARL Yes.

CHRISTINA When you talk about working for a small one, where was that?

PEARL In Hamden, Maine. In South China, Maine.

CHRISTINA Where did you work a switchboard, Betty?

BETTY At the Brattleboro Retreat [in Brattleboro, Vermont]. It was in the Depression and you took what you can find. As I said, I hated PBX work, and I think it was because I was sitting down all the time, so I quit and went back a couple of months later and went on the wards, and I liked that much better.

PEARL One period I worked for the Connecticut Light & Power Co., down in Norwalk, Connecticut. I hated it because it was that company—period. You know, you didn't have that personal touch.

CHRISTINA It is interesting now. Sometimes you get an operator on the phone who seems to love what they're doing, and others—you can tell they don't want to be there.

MARY You know they don't want to talk to you.

PEARL They watch the clock, but they wouldn't give you the time of day.

BETTY At the Brattleboro Retreat it was very impersonal. You couldn't even say "boo," or the boss would call you over. I just detested it.

MARY Oh, I'd hate it too.

PEARL Yes.

HANNAH The thing that shocks me—every time I pick up the phone and the operator is a man.

PEARL Yes! It does startle you, doesn't it?

MARY You don't think they should be doing it?

HANNAH I'm not used to it yet, you know.

BETTY When that happens to me, I always say to myself, "You're substituting."

CHRISTINA That is an interesting thing. Do you feel that men should not be doing that kind of work?

ALL Oh, we're just not used to it yet.

BETTY It's just like women going into men's jobs.

PEARL Some of the offices that I worked in, the men came in and learned to operate the switchboard, so they could better be able to understand the workings of it.

CHRISTINA Ella, you have done a lot of different things.

ELLA Well, I use to work out doing housework, but I never liked to do it. There was usually too many bosses. And I never could stand to work where there were too many bosses. But I liked farming about as well as anything. I have drove the tractor on the farm, raked hay, cultivated the plowed ground, planted the seeds. I've raised four different herd of cattle on the last farm we were on. I raised every one except four. I couldn't teach the men how to raise them. They didn't do it right. They didn't take the time and you couldn't tell them. You couldn't teach them to measure out feed that you gave them. I weighed their feed and, of course, I made pets of them. We had an auction in 1964 or 1965. Well, they wasn't moving my calves right. They couldn't get them into the truck. I said to Irving, "Let me have that rope and get that man behind them out of the way with his club. *I'll* move the calves." He said, "Oh, you can't do it." I says, "You just give me that rope, and see if I can't do it. They *know* me." I took that rope in my hand and put my arm around their neck. Even though they were three years old, they walked in the truck just as easy—

CHRISTINA They trusted you.

ELLA They knew me. That to me was, well, just like a bunch of children, and I raised them up and took care of them. I'll bet today if I could see any of those heifers, they'd remember me.

CHRISTINA That was the most satisfying work that—

ELLA And I have, when we had a small place, rather than be gone way out working, I'd stay at home and take care of the cows, milking the cows. In 1936, we hayed way down above Cabot Village toward Walden Heights. At night, I'd go home. In the morning, I'd take the milk to the creamery, pick up grain for the horses, and groceries. Then I'd rake the field until three o'clock, and they'd let me go home. I'd have my cows milked and turned out by the time he'd get home at night.

CHRISTINA Any of you involved with farming, were there any jobs that you didn't do?

MARY The only job that I didn't do was spread manure. [Much laughter.]

CHRISTINA Mary, was that like, "That's it. I'm not going to spread manure," or what that just something that women didn't do?

MARY Well, I didn't refuse to do it, but I guess I wasn't pressured to do it. Other things I could do. I'd run the milking machine or milk the cows by hand. I've done everything else, I guess. Bailed hay.

BETTY One thing that I didn't do was spread manure. And my husband wouldn't let me either.

MARY Well, I never asked my husband. [Laughter.]

BETTY When he was sick, I would wonder how we were going to get it out.

MARY Well, we usually had a hired man, anyway, so—

PEARL We didn't. You just took a manure fork, psst, and threw it this way.

CHRISTINA So you were involved in shoveling out the barn, but probably not—

MARY Oh, I have cleaned the barn many times.

PEARL But we weren't just lucky enough to have a manure spreader.

ELLA On this last farm we had, we had a gutter cleaner.

MARY We never had a gutter cleaner.

ELLA I've cleaned the stable with that. On the little place, I use to clean it out by hand when he was gone working. On the first farm we had, he worked out for five dollars a week.

BETTY We had a gutter cleaner. It had a shovel in front of it. [Much laughter.]

CHRISTINA Really fancy.

HANNAH This is almost a foreign language to me.

MARY Well, we paid seven dollars a week for a hired man. But, of course, he had his board. He stayed for seven dollars a week for several years.

HANNAH Almost a millionaire.

MARY That was in the Depression. He bought a car.

BETTY With his board and room, he did all right. When I went to work in the hospital, I got seven dollars and a half or seven eighty, and my board and room. I did all right. I was lucky to have a job.

MARY Well, when I taught school, I got seven hundred dollars a year. What would they think now?

IDA I got ten dollars a week and had to pay five for my board when I started.

MARY Well, I had to pay for my board, too.

BETTY Those who taught school got low wages for years, until the last ten or twenty years, anyway. For years and years, eighteen hundred was about the largest I heard of, until they began to have state automatic wages.

CHRISTINA Even when I started teaching in 1969, ten years ago, the jump in salaries has been mammoth in that space of time.

MARY I guess so.

CHRISTINA And the principal whom I started working under, who was in his late fifties at the time, had started at three hundred dollars a year, I believe, in the southern part of the state. So he had seen in his lifetime, in his teaching span, just huge differences in salaries.

MARY I taught for years and I didn't get only eight fifty, I think, at the end.

BETTY Do you remember in the W.I.S.E. program, somewhere, we had that discussion on when teachers went to board at different houses?

ALL Yes.

BETTY And the wood was brought in.

CHRISTINA Were the teachers, when you were growing up, when you were children—were they mostly women or was it mixed pretty much?

MARY I had two men teachers in graded school

BETTY We had all women teachers in graded school in St. Albans, and the principal was a woman. We had a male principal in high school, and before I got through, I remember, we had two male teachers.

CHRISTINA Now, was the teaching position a respected position?

ALL Oh, yes!

CHRISTINA Especially for women? Was it *as* respected for men?

MARY They just didn't do it.

PEARL They were mostly principals, weren't they?

IDA I think the salary was too small.

HANNAH They were gym teachers in New York City. Or biology or science teachers. The women taught mostly reading, writing, and arithmetic.

BETTY Who ever heard in those days of a man nurse?

MARY No, that's right.

PEARL There were so many of the boys, by the time they got into high school, that were full grown, practically men, it took men principals to control them.

CHRISTINA So that was one reason they filled that position?

BETTY In the little one-room schoolhouse, they use to have to have a man go in and straighten them out. And that was really their duty—straighten out the big boys.

CHRISTINA And that was sort of a principal? Or might he be a teacher?

BETTY Well, he might not be a teacher, like going to Teacher's College, as they called it in those days, but he was able to teach. But he couldn't teach anything when those boys were acting up.

CHRISTINA Right.

BETTY So if he straightened them out in one or two semesters, they could go back to ladies teaching.

PEARL To go back to the farm thing, we had a small farm and it was basically chicken. And we were doggone glad to chop those heads off and get rid of them. Doggone chickens! You'd go in and they would fly all over the pen. We got a bull calf and thought we would raise and have it to eat, but we made such a pet of it, we never could. [Laughter.]

CHRISTINA I've heard *that* story before—

IDA It was one of the family, wasn't it?

CHRISTINA I guess related to the other question I asked, about jobs you didn't do on the farm, were there divisions of labor in your family? I don't know—for example, my mother kept the money books for the house while my father was the major money earner. But she did all the bookkeeping in terms of paying for the food and any household expenses and that kind of thing. That was just set; I don't know how that came about. She use to pay by check a lot, so she would go over her checkbook. But she was in charge of all household expenses.

PEARL You see, you're a younger generation.

MARY You see, we didn't have money enough.
CHRISTINA No, she's sixty-eight.
PEARL Not seventy.
CHRISTINA Is that what your birthday makes you? Seventy?
PEARL Today.
MARY We didn't have money enough so we had to keep records. We just had so much money, and we bought what we had to and made it go. We didn't run in debt.
IDA If we had some money, we bought something, and if we didn't, we went without.
CHRISTINA So it was a really shared—
BETTY Isn't it so that the women use to have a flock of hens or some such thing for their spending money?
LILLIE That's what they called their "egg money."
MARY I never had hens but I made sugar cakes and things like that, you know.
CHRISTINA And that would be money that you would spend? And how might you spend that?
MARY Any way I wanted to.
CHRISTINA So it could be for clothes—
MARY But usually something on the farm.
LILLIE It had to be, didn't it?
PEARL Put a new patch on the dress—
MARY Yes, because we bought our farm in the Depression, and I cut Bert's hair and he cut mine once. But he cut it so high that he never did it again. I didn't have to have it cut for months! But I use to cut the kids' hair, though.
BETTY Did you wear a hat, then, every time you went out?
MARY Oh, no, I didn't go very much anyway.
PEARL It wasn't very many years ago that Leo cut my hair, but he never did agin. He kept trying to straighten it up. [Laughter.] Pretty quick there wasn't anything left to straighten.
HANNAH We use to cut the kids' hair, too. Every once in a while it would get lumpy and we would send them to the barber. And this one time Jerry would go, and I told him, "Tell the barber that you want a haircut so you won't have to come back for three months." The barber cut it all off and he came back bald and crying.
PEARL Just before we moved over here, Leo cut my hair, and he kept going up one side, then the other. But I lived through it.
CHRISTINA I guess my question doesn't register. It seems that everything was shared a great deal. There weren't things you didn't do, necessarily, because you were a woman?
BETTY Oh, no, we worked together all the time.
MARY We did what had to be done.
CHRISTINA You did all of the farm work if that is what had to be done. Was the housework also taken care of in a shared way? Cooking?
IDA Papering the walls. Painting 'em.
BETTY Sometimes Kenneth would get the supper and that was a real treat. And wallpapering. Everything.
MARY I never had anyone come in and paper in my life.
BETTY We *shared our* work. It made it fun, too.
CHRISTINA Would you usually cook the meals?
MARY I did.
BETTY Yes, I guess so.

PEARL Leo couldn't boil water, so—

MARY Well, I don't think Bert ever had time to cook.

BETTY Once in awhile my husband used to get a meal for me and surprise me, and it was a treat.

IDA George used to do that a lot.

BETTY He could cook. But that wasn't as bad as some of the other housework you had to do and that was nice to share it.

CHRISTINA Well, what about, like on some of the tapes from the W.I.S.E. program, people talking about spring cleaning and cleaning up the rugs and getting the mattresses aired—

IDA I think the men wanted to be scarce then.

PEARL Everything went outdoors.

CHRISTINA Was this mostly a woman's—

ALL Yes.

PEARL At Morristown Corners, right on the four corners, there is this store which Leo and I bought. Mr. Carlton's wife had been dead a long time. So it got so that he would just take a shopping bag and walk down to Morrisville every day and get what he would need to sell for that day. So naturally that place was a mess.

BETTY It must have been awfully rundown.

PEARL Oh, it was. And dirty, you know, because he'd been alone so long. So we bought that, and we fixed that all up and painted it inside and out. And up from there a little ways there's a—where you start to go up on Cole Hill toward Stowe. Not from Morristown Corners, but you go up further and then you can go off into Johnson that way. So there was a little house there that was all to pieces, so we bought that and fixed that all up, and people are still living in it. Now, let me see, there was another place—

HANNAH When did you own the store, Pearl? I never knew you were in that store.

PEARL Well, it was when we first moved over here. A young couple, a brother and sister, bought it from us. It's when Leo started working on the railroad, because he had a chance to go on the railroad from there. So he did that, and I run the store for quite awhile, and I got kind of sick of it and wanted to go on to something better. But we were the ones that named it the Corner Store. It never had a name, just Martin Carlson's. He use to sell grain and everything.

MARY He went around and took orders, too. Because he use to come to the lake when I was in high school and take orders for groceries and deliver.

PEARL I did that for—what's that guy's name now—where the post office is now?

MARY Oh, Howard Terrill.

PEARL Howard would go out at seven o'clock in the morning and get the first thing, and Gladys Stone and I worked in there. So he'd come back and we put that order up, and while they were putting up the second one, I would take the truck and go out and deliver the groceries.

MARY They use to come way out to the farm.

PEARL I never went up that far. I delivered just in the village. And I went way up the Wolcott Road there.

CHRISTINA One thing I thought maybe was different, if you can remember back, is what kind of work you did as a child.

MARY Did most everything, I guess.

CHRISTINA If it was on the farm or within your family, in terms of helping with the dishes or food preparation?

HANNAH Hmmm! I was the oldest of twelve. Need I say more?

IDA My sister and I were six years old. We went to school, we come home, changed our dresses (we didn't have a dress for every day), we helped with the supper, washed the dishes and wiped 'em and put 'em away, and each took a broom and swept the kitchen, one on each side. And then we had three armfuls of wood to bring in and three chunks apiece to bring in for the night.

CHRISTINA And that was every day, that was what you had to do?

IDA It didn't kill me.

HANNAH Ida, what if she didn't do her half?

IDA I spoke to my mother then. She was very apt not to. She was the baby.

BETTY We use to divide the table in half and I never took a dish off the other side or even a half.

HANNAH "I did my half." I heard that so often.

PEARL We lived in one place. We had a cesspool. The water from the roof and the rain and snow would come down into the cesspool, so that is what we used for washing, and so forth. And then we had to go across the road and way down a steep, steep bank for our drinking water from a spring.

MARY We carried our drinking water, too.

PEARL What do you call it now? It's suppose to be real good for you—Stink—oh, my—

MARY Oh, I know, sulphur springs.

PEARL Sulphur springs! It tasted—

LILLIE But it tasted good after you got used to it.

PEARL After you got used to it. Then wasn't the other water flat?

MARY It tasted like rotten eggs, that's what it tasted like!

LILLIE That's what it smelled like, too.

MARY I *guess* it was good for you.

BETTY We would stand there doing the dishes, you know. It would take us an hour to do a few dishes. I'd say, "How many things can you find in the kitchen that start with the letter B?" We use to play games all the time. I don't know how Mother ever put up with us. I don't know.

CHRISTINA Did you have a sister?

BETTY Two sisters and two brothers. My brothers didn't do it.

MARY They probably had to do something else.

CHRISTINA What did the boys have to do?

BETTY I don't know what they had to do in the city. I don't remember that they had to do anything.

MARY On the farm, the boys would have to work.

CHRISTINA Was there a division? They would do outside things and you did the house-care chores?

MARY Of course, I didn't like to do housework either.

PEARL Me either.

HANNAH I don't think that it should ever have been invented. [Laughter.]

BETTY I'd much rather work outside than inside.

PEARL It's the most thankless thing.

BETTY It was *fun* outside.

PEARL Yeah, it didn't make any difference how dirty or hard it was outside.

BETTY You just enjoyed every bit of it.

CHRISTINA Did you feel limited when you were young and you had to do inside chores? Did that bother you?

IDA Well, we just had to do it.

MARY I just got through it as quick as I could.

CHRISTINA But did you ever think it was unfair at all?

ALL No.

PEARL Never thought it was unfair. I always hated it—

LILLIE It was one of those things you had to do.

IDA We didn't think any more about it than getting up in the morning. We didn't get any pay for it.

LILLIE You didn't get no allowance.

HANNAH You got paid if you *didn't*, Ida.

IDA There wasn't any allowance to get!

CHRISTINA Now, with your own children, or nieces and nephews, did they get allowances, or is that something that started with—

MARY My kids didn't get allowances. If they needed something, why we bought it. [General agreement.]

HANNAH It was more if they *had* to have it, Mary.

ALL Yes, yes.

BETTY Observing over the generations, I think this allowance business and giving children so much came after the Depression, after the Depression children grew up. They wanted to give everything to *their* children so they wouldn't be deprived.

LILLIE "My children are never going to be like I was" attitude. "I don't want them to go without like *I* had to go without." You can't get any kid to do any work unless you give them three dollars an hour. Why, they'd be insulted if you asked 'em to anything any less than that.

BETTY I had to earn my money if I was spending money in high school.

IDA In high school I got fifty cents some weeks.

HANNAH That was a *lot* of money, Ida.

CHRISTINA I remember something else, too, that was on another tape about earning money. I think, Betty, you talked about it. What was your first job, now?

BETTY Taking care of children.

CHRISTINA Now, was that money that you turned over to your family, then?

HANNAH You may be sure!

BETTY Yes. Because—I remember one time, and I think other people who went through the Depression went through this, too—sometimes we didn't have any money and we'd run out of sugar and all that sort of thing, and my fifty cents I earned the night before, babysitting—that's all I got was fifty cents, but my mother insisted I stay overnight and have my breakfast—and I brought it home and that bought some sugar for the family. Usually bought five pounds.

CHRISTINA Now, how long did that go on that you just turned your money over to your family?

HANNAH Till you got married.

LILLIE In other words, they were expected to turn over until they reached a certain age.

CHRISTINA Did that carry over after you were married, if you had an outside job? I guess, by what you were saying, the money you had—

MARY You had.

BETTY It was never separated in my family.

HANNAH We had a tin box that was up on the kitchen window all the years I was raising children, and if we needed a container of milk or a loaf of bread, or whatever, you went to the box, you took what you needed, you went and got it, and you brought it back and put the change back.

BETTY And it never occurred to us that anyone would take it for anything they weren't supposed to have.

HANNAH And they never did.

CHRISTINA Oh, that's really interesting. That's very different, because, I think, at least in my experience and I think from being around other people my age, a lot of them had a situation where the parents took care of the parents' money, there was an allowance for the kids, and there was a separation.

BETTY But you see, they came out of the Depression years, didn't they?

CHRISTINA My parents had a very hard time in the Depression and I think it has definitely affected how they brought us up.

MARY I earned money picking strawberries. One of our neighbors raised strawberries, and I can remember the only thing that I ever got out of that was I bought a new coat and that was the first boughten coat I ever had, and I probably was twelve years old or fourteen, I don't know.

LILLIE And that was it, four cents a quart they used to pay. Mr. Houston down there paid four or five cents a quart.

MARY I picked for three cents.

LILLIE Us kids used to pick for Mr. Houston's down Cady Falls, that big field. The first day we went, he told us to eat all we wanted, 'cause he knew darn well you weren't going to eat any more the next day.

BETTY I can't be exact on this, because I don't remember, but I worked in a canning factory and we cut the ends off beans and do a bushel, and then we'd get a paper check. We saved those checks up till the end of the week, and we went back to the canning factory and cashed 'em in. I remember after several bushels, I took home eighty cents. Of course, somebody that was real good at it, that was older and had been doing it for years, could take in quite a little money in those days.

HANNAH How old were you then, Betty?

BETTY I was fourteen.

RESOURCES

1. *You*
2. *Participants*
3. Tape recorders and tapes
4. A quiet, accessible meeting place
5. Transportation—money and/or drivers

What you need beyond these ingredients is really up to you and your budget. Every other resource I suggest is optional.

The list presented here is not exhaustive. Unless otherwise noted, I've listed only resources that I actually used in some way in the development of these courses. I urge you to look at the other Resource sections included in this book for a fuller range of feminist materials and to note that many of the books in this particular list include bibliographies of additional resources. Especially in the field of aging, new material is constantly surfacing, not just in gerontological publications, but in popular magazines and newspapers. State library and university film collections are rapidly increasing their film resources on aging.

Your participants, too, may have a wealth of *materials* to bring to the group: snapshots, diaries, heirlooms, recipes, catalogs, etc.

Last, it's important to keep in mind that materials for your classes don't have to focus on aging or history. For example, in a forthcoming continuation of our discussion on home birth, the Builders will be viewing a film currently used in the Lamaze prepared childbirth classes for expectant parents. The contrasts to the women's own experiences portrayed in such a film should serve to stimulate discussion.

I've divided this section into two categories, Oral History and Aging, although there is considerable overlapping of content.

ORAL HISTORY

Print

1. *Builders for Tomorrow.* Address inquiries to Christina Johnston, RFD 1, Box 170, East Calais, Vermont 05650.

   A series of booklets of roughly edited transcriptions, both from the women's class and from the mixed-sex group discussions.

2. The Family Folklore Program of the Festival of American Folklife. *Family Folklore.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1976.

   A delightful collection of family traditions, anecdotes, expressions, fantasies by and for children, photography, etc., plus some interesting reading suggestions.

111

3. Fink, Marcy. "Women in History Books: The Case of the Missing Sex." High School Women's Liberation Pamphlet, 1976, pp. 22–25. Available from Youth Liberation, 2007 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104.

   A good summary article to use in establishing *why* we should study women's history. The whole issue is worth reading.

4. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, Volume II, No. 2 (Summer 1977). Special issue on "Women's Oral History." Available from Women's Studies, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309.

   Excellent. Contains oral histories of women from many walks of life and many parts of the country, as well as articles on methodology, family history, and therapeutic uses of oral history; includes a resource guide. Other issues of *Frontiers* are definitely worth reading and may stimulate development of discussion themes and questions.

5. Kornbluh, Joyce L., and Brady M. Mikusko, eds. *Working Womenroots: An Oral History Primer.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, 1979. Available from the Program on Women and Work, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Michigan–Wayne State University, 108 Museums Annex Building, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.

   Probably the most helpful book on the market for beginning oral historians. Brief, caring, practical. Useful comments about equipment and tapes. A good bibliography; see especially the section "Selected Books Illustrating the Use of Oral History."

6. Krause, Corinne Azen. *Grandmothers, Mothers, and Daughters: An Oral History Study of Ethnicity, Mental Health, and Continuity of Three Generations of Jewish, Italian, and Slavic-American Women.* New York: Institute on Pluralism, 1979. Available from the Institute, 165 East 56th Street, New York, New York 10022.

   This book became available after the close of the classes. It is a telling study, including tables and some anecdotes which demonstrate the interrelatedness of ethnicity, mental health, and the continuity of tradition.

7. Lange, Dorothea. *Dorothea Lange Looks at the American Country Woman.* Forth Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1967.

   A moving blend of pictures and statements; evokes love and respect and sadness. In a brief space, Lange touches upon many key issues in the lives of rural women.

8. *Light Impressions Book Catalogue.* Available from Light Impressions Corporation, Box 3012, Rochester, New York 14614.

   Comprehensive, annotated catalogue of image books. Even if you can't buy the books, you'll know what to look for in libraries.

9. Lyons, Joan. *Abbey Rogers to Her Granddaughter.* New York: The Visual Studies Workshop, 1976.

   A beautiful book that consists of quilt blocks and a letter from a grandmother to her granddaughter as she passes on a family quilt and the memories its pieces evoke.

10. Mirken, Alan, ed. *The 1927 Edition of the Sears, Roebuck Catalogue.* New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1970.

    Readily accessible resource that is always fun to look at with a group. Lots of evidence of sex-role stereotyping.

11. *Southern Exposure.* "No More Moanin', Voices of Southern Struggle," Vol. I, No. 3/4 (Winter 1974); and "Generations: Women in the South," Vol. IV, No. 4 (Winter 1977). Available from P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

    Both of these issues cover lots of ground; include good bibliographies.

12. Watts, Jim, and Allen F. Davis. *Generations: Your Family in Modern American History.* Second Edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.

    Textbook. Workbook format, using a series of well-selected reprints that examine many aspects of the American experience and illustrate the values of exploring your own history.

13. Weitzman, David. *My Backyard History Book.* Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975.

    Written for children, but includes lots of activities and ideas for anyone who is involved in exploring her own story.

14. Wigginton, Eliot, ed. *Foxfire.* Seven volumes. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday. Vol. I, 1972; Vol. II, 1973; Vol. III, 1975; Vol. IV, 1977; Vol. V, 1979; Vol. VI, 1980; Vol. VII, 1982.

    Oral history material produced in a high school journalism class. Good to look through to familiarize yourself with possible discussion topics. Important in the study of oral history because *Foxfire* publications were fundamental in popularizing the use of oral history and because Wigginton uses the publications as the *product-part of the learning process* for his students.

15. Wigginton, Eliot. *Moments: The Foxfire Experience.* Rabun Gap, Georgia: The Foxfire Fund, 1975.

    Geared toward schoolteachers, but useful to anyone doing oral history and working at being a sensitive, constructive teacher.

Films/Slide Shows

16. *And Ain't I A Woman? A History of Women in the United States from 1600 to the Present.* Produced by Deirdre Delaney, Mary Fastabend, and Leona Pollack. Available from the producers at P.O. Box 730, Boston, Massachusetts 02102.

    A concise (15-minute) overview of U.S. women's history in slide-tape format. Narrative transcript and teacher's guide included. Available for rental or purchase.

17. Appalshop Films. Write for catalog to Box 743N, Whitesburg, Kentucky 41858.

    The catalog contains several films useful for stimulating discussion. I used *Quilting Women* (16 mm, color, 28 minutes), a visually beautiful film that raises issues of working together, women's art, handing down traditions, etc. I also used *Nature's Way* (16 mm, color, 22 minutes), about home remedies and a home birth assisted by a midwife.

18. New Day Films. Write for catalog to P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey 07417.

    Yudie (16 mm, black-and-white, 20 minutes) portrays an elder Jewish woman of New York City's Lower East Side. Celebratory. Rural women responded to

Yudie's thoughts about work, family, and childlessness. Viewing the film also brought up the issue of anti-Semitism and the differences between women's rural and urban experiences. Other relevant films distributed by New Day Films are *Union Maids*—historical film footage and photographs, woven together with filmed oral history interviews with three union women—and *With Babies and Banners*—oral histories of women who took part in the Women's Emergency Brigade during the 1937 Flint, Michigan, sit-down strike.

19. *Women of Vermont.* Available from the American People's Historical Society, 295½ Maple Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401.

    A filmstrip with cassette soundtrack.

Organizations

20. Local and state folklore and historical societies (check phone directory.)

    Good resources to find out what has happened and what is happening locally in oral history. They may be able to provide you with artifacts, with background material for developing questions, and even with participants for a group.

21. Oral History Association. Address membership and other inquiries to Ronald E. Marcello, Executive Secretary, Oral History Association, North Texas State University, P.O. Box 13734, NTSU Station, Denton, Texas 76203.

    Members receive the *Oral History Review* annually and the *Oral History Newsletter* quarterly. Although there's a decidedly stuffy tone to the organization and its publications, more and more articles concern women's studies. The *Newsletter* contains information about new oral history films and publications.

AGING

Print

22. *Aging: Selected Titles in Gerontology, including Classic and New Titles.* Fairfax, Virginia: National Publications Center, Inc. Available from the Center, 2820 Dorr Avenue, Suite 202, Fairfax, Virginia 22030.

    An annotated, up-to-date listing published annually.

23. Blythe, Ronald. *The View of Winter: Reflections on Old Age.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979.

    An exquisitely written book based on Blythe's careful listening to elders' stories. A cogent author, Blythe is able to reacquaint us with Western literature's characterization of the aged, as well as effectively remind us that *we*, all of us, are the old.

24. Coatsworth, Elizabeth. *Personal Geography: Almost an Autobiography.* Brattleboro, Vermont: The Stephen Greene Press, 1976.

    A highly cultured, well-traveled woman writing about her life. A few jewels of thought about aging.

25. Cunningham, Imogen. *After Ninety.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977.

A collection begun at age ninety-two. Strong images that speak to women's aging experiences.

26. Ghazahekian, Bonnie. "How My Mother Helped Me Put Her in a Nursing Home," in *Ms.*, March 1979, pp. 62–67.

An emotional statement about a daughter's decision and guilt about the nursing home issue.

27. *New Age*, Vol. 4 No. 8 (February 1979).

Issue contains several positive articles, including an interview with Maggie Kuhn of the Gray Panthers; a look at the New Wrinkle Theatre; a resource guide to available services, self-help groups, and activist organizations; and more, all looking at age as a healthy *life* process.

28. *OWN.* Newsletter of the Older Women's Network, 3502 Coyote Creek Road, Wolf Creek, Oregon 97497.

A shoestring cooperative newsletter, networking "back to the land" elder women. Important, exciting to read, although probably not representative of many rural women.

29. *Print and Audiovisual Resources from the Institute of Gerontology.* Available from the University of Michigan, 520 East Liberty, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.

A wide selection of useful materials.

Film

30. *Peege.* 16 mm, color, 28 minutes. Available from Phoenix-BFA Films and Video, Inc., 468 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. 1974.

This film is described in the curriculum (see p. 81). It has a Hollywood-style presentation, but effectively raises painful issues about nursing home life.

Part II: Courses in Women's Studies for Urban Communities

5. BLACK WOMEN'S CULTURE

Lorraine Bethel

INTRODUCTION

"Black Women's Culture" is a twelve-week workshop series planned for Black and other Third World women in alternative educational settings. The course guide was created out of a Black feminist consciousness: a political awareness of the oppressive racial/sexual dynamics of Black women's lives. In this consciousness, both sexism and racism are viewed as imposing serious limitations on Black women's freedom and as being equally negative and systematic threats to Black female survival, each to be actively resisted and eliminated.

Black feminism is based on confronting the fact that Black women are doubly oppressed, as women and as Black people. It focuses critically on the way Black women's membership in these two groups has given them the least access to economic privilege and political power in a society structured along racial and sexual lines. Black feminism treats the lives of Black women seriously. It struggles for a world in which being Black and female would no longer mean being underpaid, overworked, and invisible to the dominant male and/or white culture except in certain predefined stereotypical roles such as domestic servant, prostitute, and welfare mother. It takes a political stand against placing limitations on human lives based on color, class, and/or gender.

Because a significant part—though certainly not all—of Black women's culture has been developed by Black women as a means of surviving a destructive racial/sexual system, a meaningful examination of this culture is impossible without first acknowledging and understanding the material, economic, and political conditions at the root of its existence.

Our interest in and study of Black women's culture emerged out of a primary, active feminist commitment to reclaiming the neglected and distorted areas of Black women's lives and to identifying the positive, creative, and valuable aspects of being both Black and female. Readers who have not been exposed to Black feminist theory can find basic materials for developing a working knowledge of the subject in the Resources section of this chapter.

Lorraine Bethel *has facilitated workshops on Black women's literature and Black women's culture for various institutions. She has published literary criticism and articles on Black women's writings in several publications, including* Black Women's Studies, *and is co-editor, with Barbara Smith, of* Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue.

118

GOALS

Black women's culture is totally unacknowledged in this society. The interaction of racial and sexual politics forms the basis of Black women's position in American society. The racism of the dominant white culture restricts most Black people from participating in what is traditionally regarded as "high" culture: literature, theatre, architecture, etc. The art Black people create in the forms most accessible to them—music, dance, oral literature, etc.—is then dismissed by the dominant white culture as "folk" art, unworthy of serious consideration or analysis.

Similarly, women have traditionally been restricted from fully participating in what is viewed as high culture—painting, instrumental music, filmmaking—and relegated to "minor" domestic arts such as needlework. The combination of sexism and racism in these areas has meant that Black women have been allowed the least access into the realm of high culture because of being both Black and female. The culture Black women have managed to create in the few forms that have been open to Blacks and/or women is dis*missed as inconsequential*, not real culture at all.

Even when Black women do create in forms defined as part of upper-class culture, such as literature, they are not regarded as serious, capable artists who deserve recognition; their work is not included in the general body of American literary culture. Black women writers and their literature, along with the majority of Black female artists and most of Black women's culture, are invisible.

The goals of this course are:

- To make students familiar with the *existence* of Black female culture. Identifying elements of Black female aesthetics in the midst of a dominant white male culture is a major achievement in and of itself.
- To explore the elements of Black female culture in their everyday manifestations—in participants' lives and experiences, as well as in formal and more public cultural artifacts such as Black women's literature, music, dance, and visual arts.
- To introduce organizing tools and concepts that will enable participants to discover the richness and variety of Black women's culture and, in doing so, to develop their analytical skills.
- To examine and understand the racial/sexual politics of Black women's lives: to see how politics affects, shapes, and defines Black women's cultural expression and to develop in the course a Black feminist cultural criticism that is capable of doing so successfully.

We Black women have an incredibly rich and valuable culture. Within American society, we form a distinct cultural group whose skills, values, means and modes of expression are specific to Black female lives. By exploring our culture together, we connect with one another in supportive, positive ways, as well as reclaim the hidden elements of Black women's past lives. It is an empowering activity that allows us to define ourselves instead of being defined by others. Beyond this, identifying a Black female way of being in the world gives us a framework with which to make sense out of our past and present experiences in a white male society; it supplies us with a heritage of creative, defiant survival.

Finally, although whites and men have much to learn from Black women's lives and culture, this workshop series was designed as an exploration of Black female culture *among* Black women. Teaching about Black women's culture to groups that have few or no Black women is an entirely different matter. Because the nature of this course guide involves Black women sharing and defining what constitutes Black female culture in an experimental/conversational manner, it is important that the facilitator also be a Black or other Third World woman who can offer and examine her own personal knowledge of this topic.

ORGANIZING THE GROUPS

This workshop series was offered at a minimum security prison for women and at a community resource center in one of Boston's Black neighborhoods. At both sites participants met once a week for two hours.

At the community center, attendance fluctuated widely, from two to seven women at each session. The ages of the women ranged from twenty-four to thirty. Most of the women lived and worked within the community.

At the women's prison, participants were in their mid-twenties to their mid-thirties. The workshop series stabilized at four women who came regularly, although occasionally other women attended. Two of the women were inmates, and two were on the prison staff; this could have been a source of tension, but the trust level among these particular women was extremely high.

Although all participants who attended regularly at both sites were African-American women who were born and raised in this country, at times issues related to comparisons between African-American female culture and other Third World women's cultures in the Caribbean and Latin America were discussed. If participants who have varied backgrounds are available, a possible adaptation of this workshop series would be to examine Black and other Third World women from a cross-cultural perspective.

A major factor in selecting sites for the workshop series was the need to find existing groups of Black females to become participants. The settings described were chosen because they provided this opportunity. Locating such groups outside of an institution may prove difficult, however, because Black women are rarely able to create space exclusively for ourselves in the larger society. We approached this problem by selecting an institution with a substantial Black female population—the prison—and by offering the other series in a facility highly accessible to the women of Boston's largest Black community. Another solution might be to offer the sessions to Black women who are part of an active community program, such as a center for the elderly. These women would also have vast life experiences to share.

Outreach efforts at the prison consisted of making contact with the educational director, who then served as a liaison for creating interest in the workshop series among Black female inmates. Posters and flyers describing the workshop series' content and schedule were posted and distributed among Black women prisoners. Because the prison is a minimum-security facility, many women were serving short sentences and were unable to commit themselves to attending a long-term workshop series. To encourage more women to attend, we offered an eight-week course.

At the community center, our project was responsible for all outreach efforts. The center provided meeting space for the workshop series. Because there were no other active educational programs at the center, we recruited participants from the surrounding Black community by word of mouth and through the media—distributing flyers and posters in places frequented by Black women in the area and making announcements on local Black radio stations and television programs.

A major problem in reaching Black and other Third World working-class women is that the daily oppressive conditions of these women's lives rarely permit them the time or energy for steady commitment to a workshop series like this. Survival activities take precedence over what is seen as recreation. In Boston, the racist/sexist obstacles to Black women's mobility were made tragically clear by a series of murders of twelve young Black women within a few months. The traditional lack of value placed on Black women's lives was demonstrated by the inefficiency and indifference surrounding the official treatment of these crimes. When we were beginning the workshop series at the center, several Black women had been brutally killed, and it was impossible to tell when or if this anti-Black-female violence would end.

The murders served to terrorize Black women throughout the city. The terror was heightened in Roxbury, Massachusetts, where the center was located, because the murdered women's bodies had all been found in or near that community. Although we had scheduled sessions for the early evening in order to include working women and mothers, it became clear that many women did not attend because of the threat of violence against them. The murders caused most Black women to be so frightened for their lives that they would not go out at night unless it became absolutely necessary.

Although you probably will not have a situation of such extreme terrorism to deal with, it is important in offering a workshop series like this to be aware of practical considerations (time, location) in order to attract as many participants as possible. Safety issues are always vital when women are asked to travel at night. Black women are particularly vulnerable, because we are potential victims of both racial and sexual violence.

For the women who participated in the workshop series at the center, we tried to maintain a high consciousness about one another's safety traveling to and from the site, as well as during the session. We encouraged women to travel together in cars and offered to meet women at the subway stop near the center. Transportation funds were also available to reimburse those who took cabs. The door of the center was always locked during class, and a security guard monitored who entered and who left the building.

Remember that your workshop series will be only as accessible as you make it. Let Black women know it exists, offer it in a place that they can reach easily and safely, and hold it at a time when they can attend. Although the average attendance at both sites was relatively small—six to nine women—we eventually learned to accept this fact. Especially at the community center, we recognized the tremendous courage it took for Black women to travel to the workshop series. We saw the attendance of *any* number of participants as a real achievement, as well as a testimony to Black women's strong need to come together in a supportive environment.

LEADING THE GROUPS

The general method of presentation was discussion, stimulated by resource sharing through readings in class, audiovisual presentations, and participants' own writing. At the beginning of each workshop series we asked participants to identify those areas of Black women's lives and culture that held the most interest for them. These were the topics on which we then focused in selecting resources and materials.

Although we modified the materials slightly for the needs of each group, there were general resources basic to both courses, which are detailed in the Resources section. Black women's literature, particularly poetry, served as a primary means of illustrating, identifying, and generating discussion about important elements of Black women's culture. Usually we chose short works that could be read aloud or between classes, or we played tape-recorded poems in sessions. Literature was combined with prose selections and newspaper articles that illustrated the political issues central to Black women's lives and culture.

The strongest similarity between the two workshop series was a commitment to maintaining an experiential approach to Black women's culture. A primary goal for each session was to encourage participants to share their remembrances, observations, and experiences with Black women's culture in their own lives. Because so much of Black women's culture involves painful and deeply personal experiences, it is crucial that participants establish a trusting relationship with one another as well as with the facilitator(s). Trust was established much more easily at the women's prison, where we had a consistent group of students, than it was at the community center, where attendance varied from week to week. Although each of the sessions outlined can be taught as a self-contained unit, it is desirable to strive for a regular group of participants.

CONTENT

This section illustrates possible activities and resources for a workshop series on Black women's culture. It is meant to be used as a basic course guide that can be adapted to fit the needs and interests of different groups of women. Six topics are described that can be offered in twelve two-hour sessions. However, the topics could also be covered in more or less time, depending on the type of group you are working with and the amount of class time available.

Session One: Introduction to Black Women's Culture

A. *Goal*

To acquaint women with the existence of Black women's culture.

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Ask participants what the word "culture" brings to mind: What is culture? What are some of the basic elements of a culture? Discuss why participants are probably more familiar with the works and names of white male artists, writers, film directors, etc., than with those of Black women. Ask them to name a Black female visual artist, writer, or classical musician.

   A common experience some women may have had as adolescents is that of being taken with a group of Black students to an opera, play, or symphony in order to be exposed to "culture." Discuss the white male cultural chauvinism involved in this type of activity, and examine the ways that experiences like these combine with other forms of racist and sexist socialization to influence Black women's concepts of who can and should produce culture, as well as what type of culture is most valid and important.

   Discuss some of the following points:

   - Popular culture, or art that appeals to masses of people, is automatically considered inferior to "classical" or "high" culture, which appeals to a small, elite group. Consider the anti-human values inherent in labeling something inferior on the basis of its being entertaining, functional, and enjoyable to most people; and consider believing something is superior because the majority of people do not like or understand it, and it is above the "everyday" world. Also consider the designation of that which is closed to most non-white people and females—such as painting, classical music, or ballet—as being "real culture."

- White male culture places a primary value on obscurity: the harder something is to understand, the more cultured it is believed to be. Discuss the opera, where people listen to music in a foreign language. What is seen as the justification for this? Are the words unimportant, or do they indicate a feeling that truly cultured people should speak and understand European languages? How is the cultural elitism based on a reverence for obscuring also practiced and enforced in literature, theatre, and the visual arts by upper-class white males?
- Compare these Western cultural values with the non-Western tradition of valuing art on the basis of its accessibility to all people. African culture places a primary value on integrating art into everyday life and work; the artist's success is dependent on how many people she or he can involve in her or his music, dance, or storytelling. In this participatory cultural view, everyone is seen as being capable of art, and of being cultured. Consider the conflict between Western and non-Western cultural values experienced when African slaves and their African-American descendants tried to express African cultural principles in this society through their art, and discuss the ways that such conflict has resulted in second-class treatment and a general derision of Black women's culture.

2. When you have uncovered some of the political biases of traditional attitudes toward culture, begin to focus attention directly on Black women's culture. Consider this definition of culture: the skills and arts of a given people in a given period. Ask participants to identify the skills and arts they associate with Black women—themselves and their ancestors. Consider traditional stereotypes of Black people and Black women: we have natural rhythm, cook well, are good with children and housework, and are superstitious. Discuss whether these stereotypes are valid for participants' own life experiences. Do the stereotypes exist as realities in their own Black female culture? If so, do participants regard them as positive qualities? You can change the conversation into an affirmative one by encouraging students to consider the rich culture Black women have created in those forms available to us and to discuss the values and organizing principles of this culture. Note that Black women's culture in America has direct connections with African culture and maintains a link that extends to ancient Black civilizations.

   Share these basic guidelines for participants to follow during the workshop series. Try to illustrate from your own experiences definitions and examples of Black women's culture.

   - As Deena Mertzer states of women's culture, Black women's culture "is not a set of rules or restrictions, rather it is a direction, an eye, a broad intellectual framework for discovering form and meaning."[1]
   - Black women's culture incorporates all available information about every Black woman's experiences. "Black women's culture" does not refer only to famous Black women, or only to those who create in public forms. The resources for uncovering Black women's culture are largely personal/experiential—stories, oral history, photographs, crafts, needlework, recipes, etc.—although public forms like music, art, and literature are also valuable. Reclaiming Black women's culture in this manner is an empowering act that results in affirming the self and the lives of all Black women. It is a resource for radical and fundamental social/political change.

---

[1] Deena Mertzer, "In Her Image: Women's Culture," *Heresies: Patterns of Communication and Space among Women*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (May 1977).

In this introductory session, participants need to get a sense of the reality of Black women's culture, while understanding that this reality is not officially recognized by the dominant white male culture. At this time you might suggest that women keep a journal of their own memories, recollections, and personal experiences with Black women's culture.

C. *Resources*[1]

For background reading on the racial/sexual politics of culture, see: Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity;* Hodge, Strickman, and Trost, *Cultural Bases of Racism and Group Oppression: An Examination of Traditional "Western" Concepts, Values and Institutional Structures which Support Racism, Sexism, and Elitism;* Toure, "A Dialectical Approach to Culture."

Session Two: Black Women's Culinary Arts

A. *Goal*

To explore and define the aesthetics and sensibility underlying Black women's involvement with food as a domestic art.

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Have participants read and think about the following quote from Verta Mae Grosvenor, a Black woman, in preparation for this session:

> Stella,
>
> You want to know why I say soul food is life? Well, first off, food ain't nothing but food. No matter who you are and where you live you got to eat. Cooking is a creative thing. Cooking is the highest of all arts. It can make or break life. The world must be Gemini cause more manure has hit the fan over the twins' love and hunger than any other force. So, if you cook with love and feed people, you got two forces cooled out already. Dig, food can cause happiness or unhappiness, health or sickness and make or break marriages.
>
> I read the other day where this cat said that a lot of interracial marriages break up because of the cultural gap in cooking. Remember when you know who used to serve cottage cheese and frozen fish to you know who? Remember he used to come over to your house and cook pork chops?
>
> Anyhow, soul food depends on what you put in it. I don't mean spices either. If you have a serious, loving, creating, energetic attitude towards life, when you cook, you cook with the same attitude.
>
> Food changes into blood, blood into cells, cells change into energy which changes up into life and since your life style is imaginative, creative, loving, energetic, serious, food is life. You Dig.
>
> Vert[2]

Note that this material is a letter from one Black woman to another. It is part of a cookbook/autobiography, a classic genre in Black women's literature. In these works Black women record their lives in the context of preserving and relating recipes for traditional Black food. The fact that Grosvenor includes a section of letters in her cookbook/journal is an excellent example of the role that personal correspondence plays in recording and maintaining Black women's culture. I strongly recommend that you become familiar with at least one

---

[1] For bibliographic information about the resources listed in these session outlines, see the Resources section, pp. 125–129.

[2] Verta Mae Grosvenor, *Vibration Cooking or The Travel Notes of a Geeche Girl* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1970).

124

book of this kind prior to Session Two. Participants who have a strong interest in cooking or a group that has enthusiastic readers can be encouraged to explore this topic as well and to share their insights on the session.

2. Have participants consider traditional attitudes toward cooking and other domestic chores. You might make a list to try to identify common themes and issues. What should result is a general discussion of the racial/sexual politics responsible for the conditions under which Black women have traditionally cooked and the type of food that has become associated with African-Americans. Basic topics for discussion are:

   - A double standard is involved in the devaluation of cooking when it is performed as routine, free labor by women, compared with the way white male restaurant chefs are regarded and treated as creative artists, and paid accordingly.
   - Lower- and middle-class women have traditionally been expected to cook for their families. Black women have historically been forced to cook and perform other domestic duties in white homes since the times of slavery—first by physical coercion and later by economic repression. Black female domestics have necessarily served double duty, cooking for their own family as well as someone else's.
   - Much of what is now considered "soul food" originated from those products that were discarded as unfit to eat by the white ruling class and that were given instead to slaves. This practice was adopted from the English lords' treatment of their indentured servants. Consider the artistry of turning what one race/class labels garbage into enjoyable food—something Black women have done for generations.

   Throughout this session, a primary goal is to allow participants to share and recall their own experiences and family lore concerning Black women's culinary arts. These sessions were particularly lively at the community center. What follows is a brief account of the most useful comments and ideas as they emerged from our discussions.

   We discussed how basic the subject of food was to the Black women in our families, how cooking was one of their art forms. One of us recalled that learning to make certain foods was considered by her family to be a rite of passage into womanhood. Every girl had to be able to make a cake from scratch in order to be considered an adult. We also recalled how particular our relatives had been about the way certain dishes were prepared, for example, how ingredients were chopped for potato salad—the preparations had to be performed in exactly the right manner. One indication of the artistry of Black women's food was that certain women were renowned for their ability to prepare specific dishes. When there was a potluck or other get-together, people always expected certain women to bring particular foods they made especially well. The level of Black women's art is also seen in the fact that certain meals or dishes stand out in memory and become legendary—the Christmas dinner of a certain year, the sweet potato pie Mrs. Brown made last summer.

3. A final activity might be to prepare and sample food together as a class. Or visit a restaurant that serves traditional Black cuisine. Whichever of these activities you try, participants' discussions and memories should give the class an increased respect and appreciation for the artistry surrounding cooking and eating in Black women's culture.

   Pat Parker's poem "To My Vegetarian Friend" is a good example of Black women's humor and the politics of Black women's food. It could provide a fitting closure to the session.

It's not called soul food
because it goes with music.
It is a survival food
from the grease
sprang generations
of my people
generations
of slaves
that ate the leavings
of their masters
and survived
And when I sit—
faced by chitterlins & greens
neckbones & tails
it is a ritual—
it is a joining—
me to my ancestors
& your words ring untrue
this food is good for me
It replenishes my soul

so if you really/can't stand
to look at my food/can't stand
to smell my food/and can't keep those feelings/to yourself

Do us both a favor/& stay home.[1]

C. *Resources*

Cookbooks/Autobiographies by Black Women:

Burgess, *Soul to Soul: A Soulful Vegetarian Cookbook;* Darden and Darden, *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine;* Gaskins, *A Good Heart and a Light Hand;* Grosvenor, *Vibration Cooking or The Travel Notes of a Geeche Girl;* Lewis, *The Taste of Country Cooking.*

Culinary Arts:

Callahan and Harwood, *Soul Food Cook Book;* Parker, "To My Vegetarian Friend."

Sessions Three and Four: Black Female Style and Aesthetics—Fashion, Hair, Mannerisms

A. *Goal*

To examine the aesthetics of Black women's personal art as displayed in participants' daily lives: the clothes we wear and how we wear them, the way we look and act in general—identifying a Black female style of being in the world.

Session Three: The Racial/Sexual Politics of Appearance—Black Women's Fashion

The following discussion briefly highlights our group session based on participants' personal observations and opinions. In considering the politics of fashion as it relates to Black women, the issue of white women's position as the established standard of female beauty was identified by the group as having a strong impact on their lives. One example of this was seen in the way racism is an institutionalized element in women's mass-market clothing. Many women noted that clothes were usually sized for and made to fit white women's figures. Black and white women differ physiologically, in that Black women are generally more developed from the waist down than white women, who tend to have flat hips. Because clothing manufacturers make garments using European physiology as the norm, Black women often have to buy pants, for example, that are too big, in order to get a size large enough for their hips.

---

[1] Pat Parker, "To My Vegetarian Friend," *Movement in Black* (Oakland, California: Diana Press, 1978).

The effects of this racist sizing can also be seen in the design of dresses. One woman offered the observation that she frequently sees Black women, especially older ones, in dresses that have uneven hems, which hang much lower in the front than in the back. This phenomenon was regarded as having resulted from the institutionalization of white women's physiques as the norm for designing and manufacturing clothing. Willi Smith, a Black designer, comments on this:

> We're different. Black skin is not white skin. Black hair is generally different from white, and our bodies are different too. Many of us have short waists and wide hips, hips with that extra cushioning in the back. Other people are rarely focusing in on our bodies when they design. They focus in on other shapes, and that's fine too; it's their artistic visual trip. I can remember hearing my grandmother and mother talking about not being able to find trousers that fit. My trousers have always had an extra fullness to them—extra ease. The easy looseness you see in trousers now has always been my way, long before they were what's happening.[1]

A recurring element of this discussion was the women's sense of relief at being able to have their individual experiences with institutionalized racism shared in a group context and thereby to have those experiences validated and legitimated. Some women talked about the self-hatred they felt as young girls when store-bought clothes would not fit properly. They assumed there was something wrong with *them*, individually, and had no way of knowing the problem was a common one for most Black women. The entire session had a very positive function in allowing participants not to feel "crazy" because they varied from the white female norm.

Identifying and understanding this norm allow women to stop blaming themselves for things that are controlled by forces outside their domain. This process is comparable to what many women experience as part of a feminist consciousness-raising group: the "click" of being able to identify and understand, through the process of discussion with other women, in this case Black women, like themselves, that part of their experiences as women that is hidden and/or denied by the larger society.

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Although your discussion of the racial/sexual politics in fashion and appearance may vary somewhat from this example, depending on participants' experiences, you should attempt to create an atmosphere in which Black women can uncover and make sense out of their personal encounters with the white female mystique in American culture. The participants need to understand the collective political dynamics of their own Black female experiences. A simple exercise for stimulating discussion is to bring in copies of popular fashion magazines (*Vogue, Glamour, Worth*) and to ask participants to consider what kinds of beauty and aesthetics are being defined and promoted by the fashion industry. Are they in any way affirmative of Black women's lives?

---

[1] "*Essence* Salutes Willie Smith," *Essence*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

To move the discussion to a positive note, make sure you set aside a portion of class time for participants to consider the *positive* ways that Black women deviate from the white cultural norm when they impose African aesthetics and principles onto Western fashion. This is the subject of a prose poem by Linda Brown, a Black lesbian feminist writer:

> We wear the secret garments and trinkets of the past.
> Still wear the traditional garb of the motherlands. I sit with many earrings in my two ears. . . Some of us today wear the braids, the rings; the trinkets and talismans in the old traditions. We are also booted, covered by hats, belts, pants that show the form. Ties, silk shirts, soft cashmere sweaters. We are sweltering, cool-colored; with no undergarments, sandaled feet, in summer. We carry large pouches on our shoulders. Perfect for open-air markets. Peach and corn pouches, with still enough space for thread and small cast-iron pots; the book that can't be left behind; tomorrow's socks.[1]

Brown's poem is a literary examination of Black female aesthetics: the African traditions and sensibilities that African-American women incorporate into our personal art—our day-to-day lives and personal appearance. The examples she refers to are important indications of African elements in contemporary Black female fashion. Many Black women today wear multiple earrings (three or more, or two in one ear) and large or small pouches slung across their shoulders or hanging down on their chests. Both of these practices are rooted in African culture, where a woman's jewelry is often her personal fortune. The amount and type of jewelry worn are often symbols of social ranking and/or marital status. Similarly, pouches in African aesthetics are not only decorative, but functional as well—they are used to conceal talismans and spiritual paraphernalia.

Therefore, African-American women, by adopting these elements into their dress, align themselves with an ancient Black cultural and spiritual heritage. You might wish to have participants discuss the trivialization and misinterpretation of African aesthetics when they are co-opted by white commercialism. For instance, many white women now wear multiple earrings as a fashion or fad but have little or no recognition of its Black cultural/spiritual origins. Similarly, pouches are also a part of mainstream contemporary fashion. However, it was Black women who were in the vanguard in incorporating these elements into mass fashion.

2. Participants should be invited to discuss their personal style of dress and the political/aesthetic sensibilities behind it. If they incorporate African elements, like those mentioned, into their appearance, ask them to share the motivation and reasoning behind doing so. Quoting Linda Brown's work might be an effective way of prompting discussion about Black female aesthetics in fashion as personal art. A related exercise involves distributing copies of *Essence*, a fashion magazine for Black women, and asking participants to look for examples of African aesthetics combined with Western dress.

   In considering the issue of Black women's fashion, attention to the following issues is vital:

   - How do stereotypes of Black women as prostitutes and/or "loose women" affect Black female dress? Do Black women dress in an upwardly mobile fashion to counter our image as sexual objects, while middle- and upper-class white women dress in a downwardly mobile manner (such as wearing

---

[1] Linda Brown, Untitled Poem, 314 East 91st Street, #5e, New York, New York, 10028, 1979.

128

jeans and workshirts) because they have the security and protection of class and white-skin privilege?

- How do traditional stereotypes about Black aesthetics affect Black women's dress (for example, the idea that Black people love the color red, or gravitate toward loud, gaudy fashions)? Consider these attitudes in the context of traditional African aesthetics. Bold, colorful prints and primary colors are basic to the African sensibility and can have a specific, spiritual significance in African societies. Discuss the ways that these stereotypes of African-American dress are based on Black people transferring essentially African values to those materials available to us in Western society. A friend once remarked that it made sense for Black people to like red because primary colors look so good on dark skin.

What will, it is hoped, emerge from this session is a chance for participants to consider the ways that Black women use fashion as a personal/political art form in our day-to-day lives, despite our exclusion from the dominant beauty standards of the ruling class. I am continually impressed by the Black women I see in the streets every day; their originality, taste, and creativity in dress are striking. It is this appreciation for and affirmation of participants' own routine artistic achievements, as well as those of other Black women, that you should try to instill in the women throughout the sessions.

Session Four: The Politics of Black Women's Hair

The subject of hair is related to the general racial/sexual politics of appearance for Black women. It is a separate topic because the state of our hair is the area of Black women's lives in which most of us have been made to feel inadequate and inferior, in a deeply destructive way, by the prevailing white standards of beauty.

The topic drew intense responses from our group. It was the feeling of most group members that there had been a resurgence of straightened hair among Black women and men. Many women observed that it no longer seemed to be fashionable for Black women to wear their hair in a natural, i.e., unstraightened, style. This led to sharing experiences about Black hair and the role it has played in shaping feelings about being Black and female. If participants express an interest in pursuing the subject of Black hair at the beginning of the course, at least one complete session should be set aside for the topic.

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. An effective way to begin this session is to ask each participant to recall her childhood experiences about hair. If women have elected to keep journals during the course, you could ask them to record such information during the week prior to the session and to bring their journals to share with the group the following week. However you approach it, this session will raise many issues and feelings concerning the racial/sexual politics of hair.

All the women recalled having had their hair straightened when they were children and adolescents. It was most often done with a straightening, or "hot," comb—a metal comb heated on the stove or by some other source—although chemical straighteners made with lye were also used. Both processes were very painful. Participants remembered having had their faces and necks burned while their mothers attempted to straighten the edges of their hair. A major focus in discussing these experiences was to understand the collective indoctrination participants received as Black girls regarding the superiority of straight hair; it was considered the best and only respectable style for them to wear. A significant issue for us as a group was the assessment of the psychic damage inflicted on us by having been forced to use such painful methods in order to alter such a basic part of ourselves. The message conveyed on many levels was that, as Black women, we were not acceptable, not adequate, and certainly not attractive in our natural state. This feeling of being "wrong" and never good enough extended to other areas of our lives as Black females, but had a basic and primary grounding in the negative attitudes we perceived toward our skin color and the texture of our hair.

Even during the times that their hair had been left unstraightened, participants recalled that the way their hair looked was often a source of conflict and/or tension between themselves and their mothers. Some women talked about negative incidents having occurred when their mothers were rough in combing or braiding their hair in an attempt to make it more "presentable." Other participants remembered having had headaches because their hair was braided too tightly and pulled at their scalp.

In light of these experiences, most women expressed an enormous sense of relief and liberation when the Black power movement popularized natural, unstraightened hair for Blacks in the late 1960's and early 1970's. The style focused attention on the connection between public racial politics and personal appearance. It was within this framework that the group was able to examine the current popularity of straightened hair as part of a larger reactionary mood among Black people, instead of as personal and isolated phenomena.

2. Ask participants to recall any folklore or mythology specifically concerning hair in Black female culture as recounted by female relatives or acquaintances.

In our group, many women recalled that part of their childhood experiences with hair had centered on various remedies and cures for making hair grow, because the desire had not been simply for straight hair, but for *long* straight hair. The most unpleasant but popular of these treatments was a preparation called "Glover's Mange," which was actually a treatment for animal fur, but was adopted by many Black women for personal use. This solution was applied to the scalp and left for a period of time. It had a strong, foul odor, which made it dreaded by most of the women who were treated with it. Other prescriptions were less drastic. One woman mentioned that her grandmother had recommended flax tea, applied externally, as a natural straightener for hair. Another area of folklore and mythic beliefs was instructions participants had been given concerning what was safe and unsafe to do with their hair once it was no longer attached to the scalp. A common theme for many participants was warnings about how to dispose of their hair if it were cut or shed. They had received strong warnings about throwing their hair away in the trash and had been advised to flush it down the toilet, burn it, or otherwise destroy it so that it would not be accessible to others.

Various reasons had been given for such warnings, ranging from tales that "the birds" would use the hair for a nest and come back for more from the same head, or that the hair would never grow back if thrown away. Through our discussion, it became clear that a traditional basis for these beliefs was present in the African concept of not allowing other people access to parts of the body, which might then be used to perform evil magic. By considering the African mythology and folklore handed down to us as Black women by our Black female relatives, we were able to see instances when coded information had been passed on to us as a protective measure for our physical well-being, even though we had not been given the true explanations of the African spiritual principles behind this information.

Throughout our discussion of the racial/sexual politics of hair for Black women, a positive theme emerged, despite the negative and traumatic experiences participants associated with this topic. As we talked about these experiences, many women felt that going to beauty parlors and hair grooming were activities that allowed for an important cultural/emotional sharing among Black women—a place in which women came together and exchanged important information and energy. Some participants viewed the contact between themselves and their mothers when their hair was being done as having been a time of closeness and warmth, or as having been one of the few times when they experienced prolonged physical contact between Black women.

3. Ask participants to consider the following poem, as they rethink their experiences in beauty parlors and their contact with Black women in hairdressing environments, concentrating on rediscovering places that functioned as outlets for a positive Black female culture.

Use to be

Ya could learn
a whole lot of stuff
sitting in them
beauty shop chairs

Use to be

Ya could meet
a whole lot of other women
sittin there
along with hair frying
  spit flying
   and babies crying

Use to be

you could learn
a whole lot about
how to catch up
  with yourself
and some other folks
  in your household.
Lots more got taken care of
   than hair.

Cause in our mutual obvious dislike
   for nappiness
we came together
  under the hot comb
to share
  and share
   and share

But now we walk
  heads high
 naps full of pride
with not a backward glance
at some of the beauty in
   that which

use to be

Cause with a natural
there is no natural place
for us to congregate
to mull over
our mutual discontent

Beauty shops
could have been
a hell-of-a-place
    to ferment
        a. . . . . revolution.[1]

C. *Resources*

There are no general resources available on these topics. The best way to approach these sessions is through using literature and current periodicals to stimulate discussion among participants of their own relationship to these issues.

Black Women's Fashion
Brown, untitled poem; *Essence* (all issues).

Black Women's Hair
Campbell, "Color Struck"; Coleman, "Among the Things that Used to Be"; Morrison, *The Bluest Eye;* Washington (ed.), *Black-eyed Susans: Classic Stories by and about Black Women.*

Session Five: Black Women's Visual and Decorative Arts

A. *Goal*

To examine Black women's creativity as visual artists and as craftspersons and to appreciate the arts and crafts of Black women.

B. *Suggested Activity*

Ask women to come prepared to share experiences of Black women's art among their friends and family and, if possible, to bring samples of such work. Remind participants as well to think about the ways in which they have been influenced by the creative work of Black female friends/relatives. Invite craftswomen in the group to bring their art to share during the session. Using Alice Walker's definition of art in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,"[2] consider the range of ways Black women have traditionally created outlets for artistic expression—gardening, sewing, interior decoration, etc.

Useful ideas to consider in discussing Black female visual/decorative arts are:

- Review the kinds of arts and crafts participants have observed in the lives of their Black female relatives and friends. Are there common features in these crafts? One important quality of domestic arts traditionally performed by women—sewing, needlework, etc.—is the fact that they are activities that can be performed while other tasks such as cooking and parenting are being done.
- Discuss the functional nature of Black women's arts and crafts. Much of Black women's art consists of activities that contribute to the comfort, well-being, and survival of others. Especially important is needlework, which has traditionally been used in a variety of ways: to supplement the family wardrobe, to create necessary bedding, and to make domestic surroundings attractive as well as more livable.
- Help participants to recognize the sexual/racial politics of Black female culture in this area, too. To place contemporary Black female crafts in perspec-

---

[1] Willie Coleman, "Among the Things that Used to Be," *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue,* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 1979).

[2] Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," *Ms.*, Vol. 2 (May 1974).

132

tive, it is useful to review their socioeconomic development. Many Black craftswomen performed their art as unpaid slave labor, creating clothes and household goods for their owners. Consider the damaging effects of performing art, ideally used as a creative, expressive medium for personal fulfillment, as forced, wageless labor.

Dialogue on this topic proved to be very rewarding and affirmative for our group. Many women could identify personal examples of a Black female decorative-arts tradition in their own families and shared their experiences with the group. Participants told stories about quilts and needlework created by their Black foremothers and handed down for generations. One participant experienced a change of consciousness as she went from viewing her grandmother's seamstress work as purely functional to recognizing the artistry in the older woman's ability to sew all the drapes and bedspreads for her daughter's home. Another woman remembered that her grandmother's craft was designing and creating corsages for church functions. Other participants recalled Black women they knew who made dolls and grew flowers, particularly rose gardens. Examples came to mind of Black women who created despite material obstacles. One woman described a Black female relative who crocheted intricate designs even though she was unable to read patterns.

One participant, a craftswoman, brought examples of her leatherwork to share with the group. It was possible to see in her work an African sensibility/aesthetic, and the group discussed the ways this manifested itself in her craft. This topic was one that women appeared to feel very comfortable with. There was a strong sense of joy and pride in the creative tradition Black women have handed down to their daughters as an inspirational legacy.

C. *Resources*

Chase, *Afro-American Art;* Draden, "Harlem's Fashion Museum"; Driskell, "Black Artists and Craftsmen in the Formative Years, 1750–1920"; Ertel, "Quilting: A Heritage"; Freeman and Bray, "Keepsakes"; Newton, "Slave Artisans and Craftsmen"; Teilhet, "The Equivocal Role of Women Artists in Non-Literate Cultures"; Thompson, "Conversations and Reminiscences"; A. Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"; and R. Walker, *African Women/ African Art.*

Session Six: Black Women's Music

> But above everything else tower black women's own voices, raised in resistance to death and slavery—of the body and spirit. It is an old song with many verses, but just one refrain: freedom.
>
> —Michele Russell[1]

Black women's musical expression in song has always been at the center of Black women's culture. There is an inherent Black-woman identification in the Black female musical tradition, in the concept of a Black woman singing anything positive about herself and her experiences as a Black woman. Such songs are typical of Black women's music because Black women have used singing as a way of capturing and praising the Black female experience in the face of an almost total neglect of the sexual/racial politics and realities of this experience on the part of white and Black male and white female musicians. The task of revealing these realities in the face of centuries of such neglect is what Black lesbian feminist musicians Linda Tillery and Mary Watkins speak of in their lyrics: "If I could just tell you what it's really like/to live this life of triple jeopardy."[1]

---

[1] Michele Russell, "Slave Codes and Liner Notes," *The Radical Teacher,* No. 4 (1977).

The Black female musical tradition is one of Black women singing and writing in affirming ways about their experience as Black women, and examining carefully and consciously the political dynamics of this experience. There is a strong critique and understanding of sexual/racial politics in Black women's songs, and participants should be encouraged to keep this in mind while exploring the aesthetics and sensibilities of music as a Black female cultural expression.

A. *Goals*

1. To introduce participants to both the Black female musical tradition and the work of individual Black women musicians, in order to provide an opportunity for group members to experience various forms of Black women's music.
2. To identify the racial/sexual politics of Black women's music.

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Read and discuss background material about Black women's music. A good survey is "An Introduction to Black Music of America" in Scholastic's *Black Culture Program.*[2] Participants can read the text in Scholastic's teaching guide or view the filmstrips accompanying the guide.

   Primary concepts to emphasize in this first discussion are as follows:

   - African-American music is a product of the slaves' adapting a rich and highly developed African musical tradition to their American Black experience.
   - As Scholastic states,

     > Black music is distinct. It is unique. It is a music unto intself. It should not be compared to traditional Western music nor, as musicologists often compare it, to the Greek modes of early Western music. Its roots are not in the Western world; it springs from African soil; it is the direct fruit of the African experience and culture which it bears . . . Black music is the only indigenous American music which still remains as a definitive influence on American culture.[3]

   Have participants identify their own experiences with the various forms of Black music they were exposed to growing up. Specifically, ask them to focus on the relationship of Black women they knew to this music. Did their mothers or grandmothers sing hymns or other music as they performed domestic chores? Categories of music to consider during this discussion are:

   Hollers
   Work songs
   Field and rural blues
   Spirituals
   The sermonette (an exchange between the congregation and the minister during a sermon, often taking an improvisational musical form)
   Linin' hymns (adding words to existing melodies)
   Convict songs
   Urban blues
   Dance songs
   Children's play songs

---

[1] Linda Tillery and Mary Watkins, *Something Moving* (California: Tuizer Music ASCAP, 1977).

[2] Scholastic's, "An Introduction to Black Music of America." *Teaching Guide, Black Culture Program.* (New York: Scholastic Magazine, Inc.)

[3] Ibid.

Legendary folk tales and songs (music sung about the experiences of a folk hero, e.g., "John Henry")
Street cries (songs to sell goods)
Gospel music
Rhythm and blues
Choirs
Jazz

In our group, most women had originally been exposed to Black music through the church, a predominantly Black female institution. We talked at length about the artistry involved in Black women's oral poetry at church services, as demonstrated by improvised songs and prayers. Similar impressions will probably emerge from your group.

The following statements are meant to help participants understand the religious foundation of all Black music, including Black women's music. Women can discuss these issues with respect to their own experiences and observations about the spiritual foundation of Black women's music.

- "As Africans, our music is sacred because it is spiritual. It has remained our common ground through 300 years of struggle and survival in this country."[1]
- "Dollar Brand does not consider himself a musician. 'Those of us who are endowed with these gifts in traditional society are medicine men,' he says. 'My father and grandfather were medicine men. The medicine man is not just a healer. That is a Western concept,' he says. 'We do not differentiate between this is food and this is music and this is medicine. The thing that keeps it all together is sound. Our concept of sound is not something that's apart, that you have to listen to on records. It's all around you. It is a part of everything.' "[2]
- "Jazz is your heritage—born—of the suffering of the early American Black people—the only true American art form—it is spiritual and healing to the Soul—listen with the ears of your heart and go home healed—keep jazz alive."[3]

Throughout the suggested activities in this session, keep trying to relate theories of the aesthetics and politics of Black women's music directly to participants' lives. Spend time with the group exploring the role Black/women's music plays in the lives of women. What function does it serve? Are the observations set forth in the quotes above and other assigned reading materials true to their own experiences?

2. Provide written material on individual Black women artists, both vocalists and instrumentalists. Two general works on the Black female musical tradition that should be made available to each woman are Michele Russell's "Slave Codes and Liner Notes" and Daphne Duval Harrison's "Black Women in the Blues Tradition."[4] Russell's piece provides an excellent overview of the politics, aesthetics, and sensibilities behind Black women's music, by examining performers such as Bessie Smith and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Harrison provides biographical information on the major Black female blues singers, many of whom are unknown today, in the context of analyzing the aesthetics and material

---

[1] Woody Simmons, "Searching for the Brother Kindred: Rhythm and Blues of the Fifties," *Black Creation*, Vol. 6 (1974).

[2] Bonnie Allen, "Dollar Brand," *Essence*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

[3] David Jackson, "Jazz Is Her Religion: Mary Lou Williams," *Black Creation*, Vol. 6 (1974).

[4] Michele Russell, "Slave Codes and Liner Notes," *The Radical Teacher*, No. 4 (1977); and Daphne Duval Harrison, "Black Women in the Blues Tradition," in *The Afro-American Women: Struggles and Images*, edited by Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1978).

conditions underlying the Black female vocal tradition. Harrison defines the concerns of her essay as follows:

- What circumstances influenced Black women to pursue the itinerant life of a tent-show and theatrical performer?
- How were Black women blues performers perceived by other segments of the Black population?
- How did their music reflect their lives?
- How did their music shape the blues in general?

Such questions can be applied to all forms of Black women's music considered by participants. Encourage women to make note of the material conditions under which most Black women musicians operated, which were usually those of extreme poverty, to assist participants in understanding the restrictions imposed on the creative freedom of these performers.

Discussion should be directed toward racism in the music industry and the cumulative effects of racism and sexism on Black female artists. The segregation of record labels, the financial exploitation of Black performers, and the general oppression of Black artists have all had a severe impact on Black women musicians. This issue can also be related to contemporary music by having participants consider the racial politics of disco music and the ways that it represents a popular co-opting or exploitation of traditional Black culture, most notably in the fact that white businessmen are once again making huge financial profits from the talents of Black performers.

One major area of sexism in music that can be observed in Black culture is the sex-role stereotyping that defines instrumental music as male territory and restricts women to the position of "girl singer" with a male band. The systematic enforcement of these sex roles is largely responsible for the high concentration of Black female musicians in the vocal arts. One way of documenting this would be to have participants list Black women instrumentalists they are familiar with. This list should be restricted to those women who are known exclusively for playing an instrument, instead of artists who sing and accompany themselves. The sex-role stereotyping in Black music can be related to the racial politics that are responsible for music being one of few public arts that Black people have gained access to in significant numbers. Just as the racial status quo is less threatened by Black *performing* artists than by Black participation in areas defined as the fine arts (painting, architecture, literature, etc.), so too are racism and sexism both served by the creation of a hierarchy of Black entertainers that places Black male musicians at the top and Black female vocalists at the bottom.

As Barbara and Beverly Smith state, "Because of our Black female oppression, so much of our artistic and cultural energy was concentrated in music, particularly singing, it both appeared and was in fact the form in which we excelled."[1] It is important to help women gain an appreciation for the aesthetics of the Black female vocal tradition, for the heights that Black women have reached in what might have been a stifling category of art. Black female singers have perfected the use of the voice as an instrument. We shared the following statement by Billie Holiday with our group: "I don't think I'm singing. I feel like I am playing a horn. I try to improvise like Lester Young, like Louis Armstrong, or someone else I admire."[2] Denied the privilege of recognition as instrumentalists, Black women have made an instrument out of the medium we have been allowed access to—our own voices.

---

[1] Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, "The Varied Voices of Black Women," *Sojourner*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (October 1978).

[2] Arnold Shaw, *The World of Soul* (New York: Cowles Book Company, Inc., 1970).

3. Focus the group's attention specifically on Black women's music. Bring examples of Black female musicians' work for participants to listen to on records or tapes. We made a tape demonstrating classic types of Black women's musical expression, both vocal and instrumental. Our recording included the work of Bernice Reagon (feminist folk singer); Abbey Lincoln, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith and Betty Carter (jazz and blues singers); Mahalia Jackson (gospel singer); Marian Anderson (operatic singer); Alice Coltrane and Mary Lou Williams (jazz instrumentalists); and Linda Tillery and Mary Watkins (lesbian feminist instrumentalists).

   You might explore the possibilities of allowing the group to experience Black women's music in performance. Classic artists such as Sarah Vaughan, "Bricktop," and Carmen MacCrae periodically tour major cities, and sessions on Black women's music could be planned to coincide with a time when one of these musicians is scheduled to appear in town. Group members who are musicians or who know of local amateur Black women performers should be encouraged to share their art with the group. Observing Black women's music in performance is the ideal way of appreciating the beauty, skill, and complexity of the Black female musical tradition.

C. *Resources*

Allen, "Dollar Brand"; Harrison, "Black Women in the Blues Tradition"; Jackson, "Jazz Is Her Religion: Mary Lou Williams"; Russell, "Slave Codes and Liner Notes"; Scholastic's, "An Introduction to Black Music of America"; Shaw, *The World of Soul;* Simmons, "Searching for Brothers Kindred"; Smith and Smith, "The Varied Voices of Black Women."

CONCLUSION

We felt that "Black Women's Culture" was a positive, enriching experience for participants at both sites and for us as facilitators. Throughout the workshop series, we were most impressed with how willing the women were to share personal and painful Black female life experiences with one another and with us. Our sessions often took on the qualities of a Black social gathering, full of laughter, fun, and good times. In this sense we were actually able to experience many of the basic elements of Black and/or women's culture in the way we related to one another as a group—speaking Black female language, "testifying" in the tradition of the Black church, and nurturing one another in keeping with the African-American concept of the extended family.

One area of the workshops that we felt was unsuccessful for participants and ourselves was the absence of a detailed examination of Black feminist politics and ideas. We tried to expose participants to the basic elements of Black feminist analysis in our treatment of Black women's culture, and there was a strong underlying feminism among many of the women at both sites. However, it became clear at the last session of the community center workshop that at least a few of the participants were still struggling with classic anti-feminist myths and attitudes specific to the Black community (e.g., feminism is a white middle-class women's ideology, feminism is a divisive element in the Black community, all feminists are lesbians and homosexuality means the extinction of the Black race) and had not shared these feelings earlier. It was very frustrating to begin the dialogue about these issues only at the very end of the workshop. We recommend that other Black women facilitating this course (a) introduce Black feminism as a specific topic early in the workshop and (b) offer basic resources and background material on the topic so that participants can clarify their feelings on these issues and be aware of how other women in the group define themselves politically.

We faced another problem in attempting to motivate participants at both sites to keep journals about the workshop. On the whole, the request proved highly unsuccessful. If you include journal writing in your course, be prepared to do considerable groundwork in order to help women feel comfortable keeping a written record to share with others.

Participants' oral and written evaluations were strongly supportive of the style and content of our workshops. We felt it was ironic that we should have been facilitating these workshop series during a period of intense violence and hostility against Black women in Boston. It added a special dimension to know that we were able to create a place for the celebration and validation of Black female lives at a time when such experiences were desperately needed as an antidote to the terror and horror surrounding us. Mass murders of Black women like those that occurred in Boston are rare, but the racism and sexism underlying this violence are common attitudes that affect all Black women's lives and deaths, although on a less dramatic scale, every day. As long as race, class, and gender are upheld as categories of discrimination by a white male ruling class, Black women will continue to lead tortured and suppressed lives. We will also continue to need an affirmative, supportive Black female culture/community in order to acknowledge the true value, beauty, and meaning of our lives and to help us keep living and struggling in the face of incredible odds. A workshop series like this one allows us to come together as Black women in celebration of ourselves, to exchange important survival information with one another, and to take concrete actions to improve the quality of our lives together. Each group of Black women that comes together to examine our culture and lives not only changes the lives of its participants, but also contributes immensely to the continuing task of creating wider possibilities for all Black women and men, and for all people, present and future. We found it to be joyous and fulfilling work and hope that you will too.

RESOURCES

READINGS USED

Black Women's Culture

Diop, Cheikh Anta. *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity.* Chicago, Illinois: Third World Press, 1978.

Hodge, John L.; Donald K. Strickman; and Lynn Dorland Trost. *Cultural Bases of Racism and Group Oppression: An Examination of Traditional "Western" Concepts, Values and Institutional Structures which Support Racism, Sexism, and Elitism.* Berkeley, California: Two Riders Press, 1975.

Mertzer, Deena. "In Her Image: Women's Culture." *Heresies: Patterns of Communication and Space among Women,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (May 1977).

Toure, Sekou. "A Dialectical Approach to Culture," *Black Scholar* (November 1969).

Black Women's Culinary Arts

Burgess, Mary. *Soul to Soul: A Soulful Vegetarian Cookbook.* Santa Barbara, California: Woodbridge Press Publishing Co., 1976.

Callahan, Ed, and Jim Harwood. *Soul Food Cook Book.* San Francisco: Nitty Gritty Productions, 1969.

Darden, Norma Jean, and Carole Darden. *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1978.

Gaskins, Ruth L. *A Good Heart and a Light Hand.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968.

Grosvenor, Verta Mae. *Vibration Cooking or The Travel Notes of a Geeche Girl.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1970.

Lewis, Edna. *The Taste of Country Cooking.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

Parker, Pat. "To My Vegetarian Friend." In *Movement in Black.* Oakland, California: Diana Press, 1978.

Black Women's Fashion/Hair

Brown, Linda. Untitled poem. 314 East 91st Street/5e, New York 10028, 1979.

Campbell, Bebe Moore. "Color Struck." *Essence,* Vol. 9, No. 4 (August 1978). Raises issues about Black hair as it relates to color prejudice.

Coleman, Willie. "Among the Things that Used to Be." *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue,* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 1979).

Essence. Available from Essence Communications, 1500 Broadway, New York, New York 10036. Back issues indexed in *Index to Periodical Articles by and about Blacks.*

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Smith, Willie. "*Essence* Salutes Willie Smith." *Essence,* Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

Black Women's Visual/Decorative Arts

Chase, Judith. *Afro-American Art.* New York. Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971.

Darden, Norma Jean. "Harlem's Fashion Museum." *Essence,* Vol. 10, No. 7 (November 1979).

Driskell, David. "Black Artists and Craftsmen in the Formative Years, 1750–1920." in *Two Centuries of Black American Art.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976. Exhibition catalog with bibliography.

Ertel, Grace. "Quilting: A Heritage." *Essence,* Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

Freeman, Roland, and Rosemary L. Bray. "Keepsakes." *Essence,* Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

Newton, James E. "Slave Artisans and Craftsmen: The Roots of Afro-American Art." *The Black Scholar: Plastic Arts and Crafts,* Vol. 9, No. 3 (November 1977).

Teilhet, Jehanne. "The Equivocal Role of Women Artists in Non-Literate Cultures." *Heresies: Women's Traditional Arts—The Politics of Aesthetics,* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Winter 1977–78).

Thompson, Phyllis. "Conversations and Reminiscences." *Heresies,* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Winter 1977–78).

Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." *Ms.,* Vol. 2 (May 1974).

Walker, Roslyn A. *African Women/African Art.* New York: African-American Institute, 1976. Exhibition catalog with bibliography.

Black Women's Music

Articles/Books

Allen, Bonnie. "Dollar Brand." *Essence*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

Baxter, Derrick Stewart. *Ma Rainey and the Classic Blues Singers*. New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1970.

Darden, Norma Jean. "Hazel Scott." *Essence*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

Harrison, Daphne Duval. "Black Women in the Blues Tradition." In *The Afro-American Women: Struggles and Images*. Edited by Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1978.

Jackson, David. "Jazz Is Her Religion: Mary Lou Williams. *Black Creation*, Vol. 6 (1974).

Noble, Jeanne. "When Malindy Sings." In *Beautiful Also Are the Souls of My Black Sisters*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978.

Russell, Michele. "Black-eyed Blues Connection." *Women's Studies Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Fall 1976); Vol. 5, Nos. 1 and 2 (Winter/Spring 1977).

______________. "Slave Codes and Liner Notes." *The Radical Teacher*, No. 4 (March 1977).

Scholastic's. "An Introduction to Black Music of America." *Teaching Guide: Black Culture Program*. New York: Scholastic Magazine, Inc.

Shaw, Arnold. *The World of Soul*. New York: Cowles Book Company, Inc., 1970.

Simmons, Woody. "Searching for the Brothers Kindred: Rhythm and Blues of the Fifties." *Black Creation*, Vol. 6 (1974).

Smith, Barbara, and Beverly Smith. "The Varied Voices of Black Women." *Sojourner*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (October 1978). Available from *Sojourner*, 143 Albany Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

Smith, Eleanor. "And Black Women Made Music." *Heresies:* Eight, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Winter 1979).

Tillery, Linda, and Mary Watkins. *Something Moving*. California: Tuizer Music ASCAP, 1977.

Autobiographies of Black Women Singers

Anderson, Marion. *My Lord, What a Morning*. New York: Viking Press, 1969.

Bailey, Pearl. *The Raw Pearl*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968.

______________. *Talking to Myself*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971.

Holiday, Billie, and William Dufty. *Lady Sings the Blues*. New York: Lancer Books, 1969.

Horne, Lena. *Lena*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965.

Waters, Ethel, and Charles Samuels. *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1950.

SUGGESTED BACKGROUND READING

This is a list of basic general resources about Black women and Black women's culture. It includes background reading in topics not stressed in our workshop series, as well as works on Black feminism.

Black Feminism

The Black Scholar. "The Black Sexism Debate," Vol. 10, Nos. 8, 9 (May/June 1979).

Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." In *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism.* Edited by Zillah Eisenstein. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1978.

Lorde, Audre. "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving." *The Black Scholar,* Vol. 9, No. 7 (April 1978).

Smith, Barbara. "Notes for Yet Another Paper on Black Feminism, or Will the Real Enemy Please Stand Up?" *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue,* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 1979).

Wallace, Michelle. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman.* New York: The Dial Press, 1979.

Black Women's History

Bert, James Lowenberg, and Ruth Bogin. *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.

Cade, Toni (ed.). *The Black Woman: An Anthology.* New York: Signet, 1970.

Harley, Sharon, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds. *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images.* Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1978.

Lerner, Gerda, ed. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary Histroy.* New York: Random House, 1973.

Noble, Jeanne. *Beautiful, Also, Are the Souls of My Black Sisters: A History of the Black Woman in America.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

Williams, Ora. *American Black Women in the Arts and Social Sciences: A Bibliographic Survey.* Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1979. Revised and expanded edition.

Black Women's Literature

Anthologies

Bell, Roseann P.; Betty J. Parker; and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, eds. *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1979.

Hull, Gloria T.; Patricia Bell Scott; and Barbara Smith, eds. *Black Women's Studies.* Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1981.

Washington, Mary Helen, ed. *Black-eyed Susans: Classic Stories by and about Black Women.* New York: Anchor, 1975.

Articles

Bethel, Lorraine, and Barbara Smith, eds. *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue,* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 1979). Available from Conditions, P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

Hull, Gloria T. "Afro-American Women Poets: A Bio-Critical Survey." In *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets.* Edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1979.

Smith, Barbara. "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism." *Conditions: Two,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (October 1977).

African-American Culture

Emery, Lynne F. *Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970.* Los Angeles: National Press Books, 1972.

Garland, Phyl. *The Sound of Soul.* Chicago: Henry Regency Co., 1969.

Harris, Middleton. *The Black Book.* New York: Random House, 1974.

Hughes, Langston, and Milton Meltzer. *Black Magic: A Pictorial History of Black Entertainers in America.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History.* New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1971.

Other Articles/Books

Maquet, Jacques. *Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

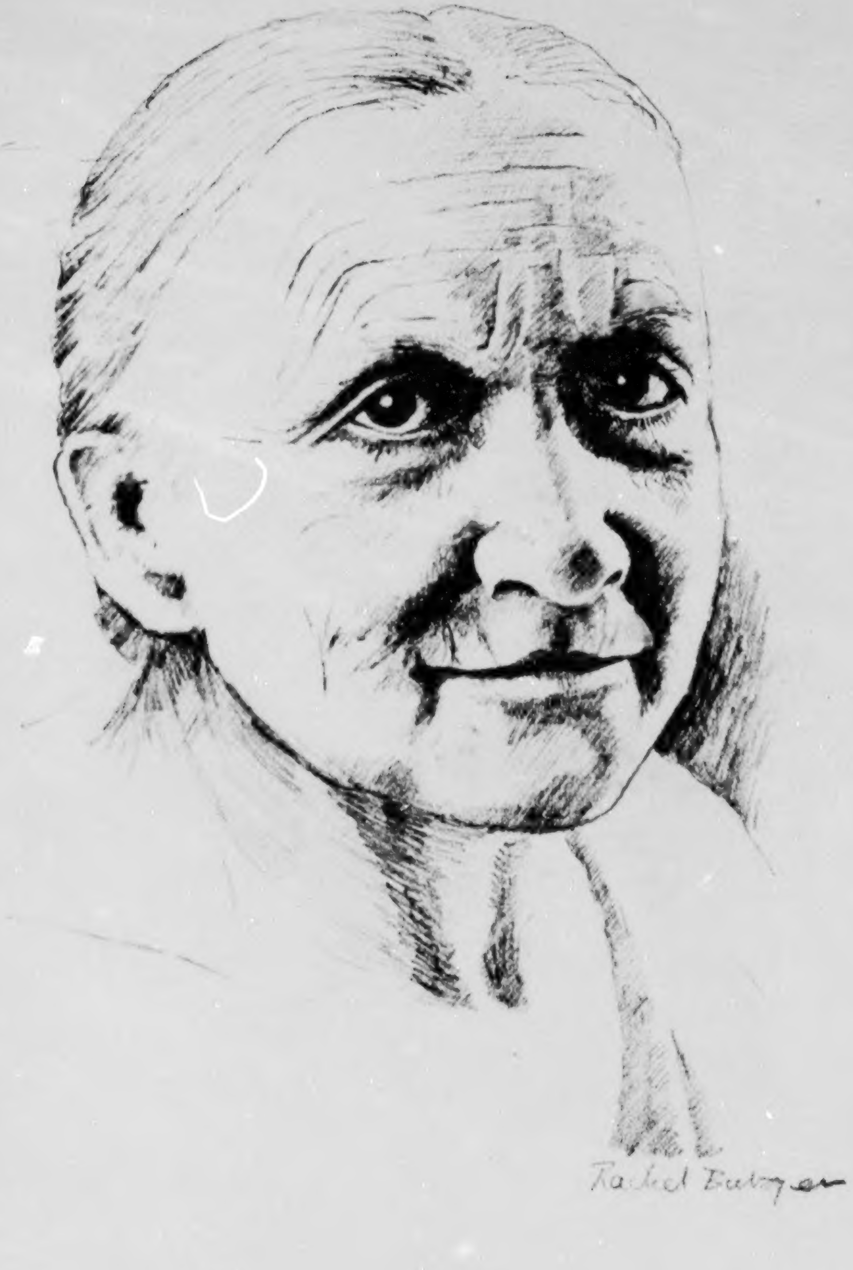
Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy.* New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1969.

Osei, G. K. *African Contribution to Civilization.* London: The African Publication Society, 1973.

______________. *The African Philosophy of Life.* London: The African Publication Society, 1970.

Smith, A. Adeyemi. "African Religion in the Americas." *African Mirror,* Vol. 2 (June/July 1979).

Williams, Chancellor. *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* Chicago: Third World Press, 1974.


Rachel Burger

6. WOMEN'S HISTORY, ORAL TRADITION, AND CULTURE

Chris Czernik

INTRODUCTION

This course guide is designed to serve as a reference and resource tool. It grew out of two workshop series entitled "Women's History, Oral Tradition and Culture." One was a twelve-week series, two-and-one-half to three hours per session; the other consisted of two single-event community outreach workshops. This guide speaks exclusively about women in the United States, but many of the concepts and theories can be applied to, or modified for, women's historical experiences in other countries. Similarly, many of the ideas, activities, and resources can be used to tailor-make a workshop for a specific group. For example, a cross-cultural balance should always be maintained, but emphasis will change depending on the racial, ethnic, age, class, and emotional or sexual preferences of the women you are working with.

Fundamental and introductory in its approach, this course guide is especially intended for women who are unfamiliar with women's history and who are community workers and organizers in various settings—community centers, YWCAs, settlement houses, and women's shelters, centers and schools. By sharing this guide with community workers, it is hoped that many more workshop series about women will be made available to community women who lack such learning opportunities because of economic, racial, age, and sexual discrimination. Although you need not be trained or experienced in women's history to lead such workshops, having some background knowledge is crucial. The descriptive materials, plus references listed in the Resources section, will be helpful in this process. This guide can also be useful to women who teach in feminist or women's studies programs in educational institutions. None of what follows should be viewed as dogmatic or as a static lesson plan. Instead, it should be seen as an incentive to stimulate your own creative ideas for designing workshops on women's history.

Women's history, quite simply, is information about women's lives; it is extremely rich, exciting, complex, and challenging. It speaks of women's experiences within the realm of a diverse female culture, but also in relation to a male culture, society at large, and a world context. Active rather than passive, both

---

Chris Czernik, *raised Polish-Catholic, was born in Chicago's "Back of the Yards" neighborhood. During the 1960's she worked as a community organizer and group worker. In 1970 she became active in the women's movement which helped stimulate her interest in women's history. Since 1973 she has been an active feminist historian, advocating the need to explore the diversity of women's history and encouraging all women to reclaim their heritage and culture.*

blatant and subtle, it tells us what has happened and what we have done, what is happening and what we are doing. Women's history swells with the oral tradition, music, poetry, literature, sculpture and painting, needlework and other handcrafted arts, cooking recipes, and herbal/medicinal remedies we have created and are creating. Likewise, our contributions as photographers, architects, doctors, nurses, spies, teachers, workers (unpaid and paid), friends, lovers, mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives have left their historical imprint. Our active participation in various social and collective movements has been major. So has our relationship to the economic, social, and political structures of our country. Learning about women's history enables us to understand more keenly the process of history—the relationship of events, conditions, and human interactions from one time period to another. Thus, we realize that current situations are rooted in the historical forces of earlier decades and centuries, and simultaneously understand that our present lives and day-to-day circumstances are the process of making history.

Oral tradition and "oral history" play a significant part in women's history. Verbal sharing—storytelling and music making—dates back to the beginning of civilization. It is the primary form for communicating our feelings, thoughts, and life experiences to children, peers, young adults, and elders. In our storytelling we pass on cooking recipes and healing remedies, we tell secrets and we gossip. It is not unusual for us to talk about what happened before we were born, about our childhood and adolescent experiences, about close relationships, perhaps about giving birth, about child rearing, and about our responses to death. We share information about our work experiences, about the hard and easy times, and about our survival.

Our music making also reflects much information about our lives. For example, African-American slave songs are filled with powerful thoughts, feelings, and actions about enslaved conditions. Often they illustrate discontent, anger, and resistance to appalling injustices; other times they function as codes for escapes to the North. Many religious songs reflect concerns and hopes about the promised land—where it was and when it would be reached. The more recent historical songs of immigrant, Appalachian, and other women are further illustrations of how music provides insight into our history. Lullabies, protest songs, labor union organizing songs, and love songs constitute a large part of our musically made heritage. This heritage adds an important dimension to our history and is a source that should not be overlooked.

Oral history is the existence of, and active collection of, people's stories and music. Women's oral history focuses exclusively on information about women's lives and about society, as told by women. It is more than personal history; it is women's view of the world beyond ourselves: the family, the home, the workplace, politics, race relations, class conflicts, and education. Oral history is also a recounting of stories, songs, and historical information passed on to us by our mothers and grandmothers. Its value becomes obvious when we realize the predominant role oral tradition and music making play in female culture. As a primary source, it takes on even greater significance when we realize how little women's history, as well as the history of other neglected groups, is actually recorded. This is especially true for "common" women whose life experiences are seldom recorded anywhere. Consequently, women's oral history, which is perhaps our most abundant source of historical information, is vital to the creation and preservation of an accurately written women's history.

The collection of these primary materials can be for the sole purpose of preservation, or for use in creating other documents. This verbal historical information can be gathered either by note taking or tape recording; interviews can be conducted either with an individual or with a group. A variety of purposes for, approaches to, and methods of collecting oral histories exist, with much room for creativity.

Whenever and for whatever reason we consider women's history, we must not think solely white and middle class. Our history, our culture, is multiracial and multi-ethnic, and it reflects various economic backgrounds. The Native American woman was in what is now considered the United States long before the colonial white woman; the African-American woman slave was involuntarily brought to this land shortly after the settling of the colonies; the Chicana was in the West long before that territory was invaded. During the early and mid-1800's, German women fled the religious persecution of their country, Irish women escaped a famine in search of food, and Chinese women were brought to the West Coast as "picture brides" and menial workers; all were lured to this country on the pretense that the United States was a land where people had their freedom, a land of plenty. More honestly, they were deliberately lured here to be exploited as cheap labor. Thousands of other white Eastern European immigrants set foot on our shores later in the nineteenth century, as did Japanese women. Twentieth-century immigration further expanded our racial, ethnic, and economic diversity in this country; it continues to do so today.

There are so many facets of women's culture to unearth and reclaim as women's history: our involvement in collective struggles and social and political movements, our achievements as individual women, and our contributions to society at large. What is most important when we study, research, teach, and share information about our history is that we be sensitive to and openly aware of the differences and similarities among women, and that we make connections with larger social, political, and economic systems.

The goals that follow are intended to provide a practical set of guidelines for applying a feminist sensibility to the teaching and study of women's history. The list summarized at the conclusion of the next section can be referred to throughout the various stages of your workshop series. The goals themselves can be used as criteria for making decisions about the content, activities, readings, resources, and methods of your workshop series, as well as for measuring its effectiveness.

GOALS

The broad goal of "Women's History, Oral Tradition and Culture"—making women's history available to community women, as a concrete body of knowledge and as a potential tool for social change—is intricately connected to yet another goal: the conscious use of feminist values. A feminist perspective requires a serious commitment to actively challenge sexist attitudes and behaviors and to work toward the elimination of sexism. Further, it does not view sexual discrimination as the only concern of a feminist politic. Prejudices toward people of different ages, economic backgrounds, emotional/sexual preferences, and races are opposed. Feminist energy is channeled into confronting and eliminating these injustices, as well as the injustices of child abuse, wife battering, rape, and violence against women in general. The task is endless and difficult. Often internalized as a way of life, feminism permeates our minute-to-minute, day-to-day behavior.

The relationship that a feminist perspective has to women's history is special. Women's history has been, and to a significant extent, still is overlooked and withheld. As women, we, too, have contributed to this situation by passively

146

accepting teachings that belittle and ignore our history. The pervasive neglect is not accidental; it has been a conscious development. The main reason for our "conspicuous invisibility," despite our fifty-percent-plus membership in society, is that recorded history has usually been written by men and thus has been governed by men's ideologies, interpretations, and value systems. Men in power write about great white men, their military strategies, their wartime victories, their presidential campaigns, and their adventures. They do not include the histories of non-powerful, unnotable people in any of the rigid historical categories they have invented, categories such as social, economic, political, and institutional history.

When women's history has been included it has been horribly distorted. Individual, famous, white, upper-class women predominate in the little women's history that exists. Their lives and contributions are regarded as "successful" in relation to a man's world; they are measured by and in accordance with male values and norms. This is not "bad" history in and of itself, but it is extremely limited.

In these and other instances women are depicted as appendages, objects, inferiors, subhumans. Our participation in shaping and leading various social, political, and collectively organized movements—such as the abolition of slavery, early women's rights, health care and reform, child care, housing, sanitation, women's suffrage, labor reform, and union organizing—are rarely mentioned. With few exceptions, male-recorded history is seen through a patriarchal, white, middle- and upper-middle-class lens. The extent to which sexism and other forms of discrimination are exercised is frightful and painful. Sharing knowledge about these oppressive biases is an excellent example of when and how a feminist perspective can critique and challenge the way our history is viewed, and what needs to be changed.

You might now ask, why is it so important to know about women's history? What significant effect could it possibly have on women's lives? Why should we share this information with other women? Women's history provides us with information and identification points both in a historical process and in our current lives. It serves as a bonding force between women of the past and the present. It demystifies our female ancestors—their roles, actions, contributions, and collective efforts. It also enables us to recognize and evaluate the interchange of women's relationship with society, society's relationship with women, and all the forces that help mold contemporary situations. Knowledge of both the strengths and weaknesses of our past is inspirational and strategic.

By unearthing and reclaiming our past, we can break through the negative images imposed on us by sexist history and by present-day society, especially the historically sexist images that often socialize us into feeling that we have to be subservient, dependent, and subhuman; that we don't have any rights, individuality, and culture; and that we have not been present and active in mainstream history. This could have a significant effect on women's lives. Being informed is not only a refusal to be kept passive, but also empowers us to change internalized images and myths, to change our lives, and to work toward social and political change in an oppressive, sexist society. Being informed also helps us look at events and conditions in our current world with more depth.

There are many reasons for sharing information about women's history with women, beyond the excitement and satisfaction. First, knowledge about women's history shatters the historical silence of our lives and culture. It gives women an opportunity to claim and investigate an enormous heritage, both individually and as a group. This helps to dismantle the existing pockets of individual isolation that have been created by a patriarchal system which has kept us ignorant and separated from each other. Second, as women come together to learn, to share information, to give, and to receive, incredible individual change and collaborative bonding occur. The more frequently such bonding happens, the greater is our strength to act collectively in making major change.

All of the concerns that have just been discussed reflect an explicitly feminist point of view. If another perspective had been used we might not have asked: What value does women's history have? Why is it so important to know about it? What significant effect could it possibly have on women's lives? And, why should we share information about women's history with women?

The following goals summarize this section and are the basis of the two women's history workshop series (Workshop A and Workshop B):

- To introduce and acquaint women who are not in traditional educational settings with women's history, oral tradition, and culture
- To put our history in a context that helps participants understand why it has been neglected and what values there are in knowing about it
- To demystify women's history and to illustrate the important role it plays in society's history
- To help women learn about the importance of history in general and how much has been left out about the vast majority of humanity
- To help women think more perceptively and critically about the present
- To encourage women to trust and talk with each other about their heritage; to illustrate the value of oral history by doing oral history; and to help validate participants' experiences through historical identification
- To help develop critical skills for examining women's history and to provide concrete resources for continuing to learn about women's history beyond the workshops
- To be sensitive and attentive to the learning needs and wants of the participants and to make the historical context relevent to their lives
- To create a supportive, non-intimidating, challenging arena in which women can learn about their history and practice oral history
- To work toward creating a strong and growing consciousness about the importance of women's lives and history
- To break through the silence and isolation that have kept women separated, thus enabling us to make changes whenever and however necessary

The remaining sections describe in greater depth how I concretely achieved these goals.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The women who participated in the first workshop series (Workshop A) were elderly, white, and from poor or working-class backgrounds. They or their parents had immigrated from Nova Scotia, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, and Italy. All were widows, most were mothers, and they ranged in age from in their mid-sixties to eighty-six. One woman had gone to college; a few others had completed high school. Each woman was a wonderful, strong, loving person; collectively, the group was quite talkative, assertive, and dynamic.

Most of them were involved with the elderly day-care program where the workshop series was held. As a grass-roots community agency, the program provided hot lunches; housing, transportation, and health care services; and educational/recreational activities for elderly residents. It is important to note here that this community site was not a residential or nursing home, in which case the workshop content, process, and dynamics would have unfolded differently.

Women must cope with so many difficult issues during the latter life stages. Their concerns include financial survival, declining health, isolation, widowhood, abandonment, loneliness, and death. Physical mobility, simply as affected by rain or snow, can also take on major significance. In addition to all of these concerns, elderly women can also experience an ever-present, agonizing worry about their productivity and worth, as viewed by the larger society.

A twelve-week workshop series emphasizing women's oral tradition and history was seen as one way of enabling these elderly women to cope with, or to change, some of their circumstances. Because most of these women lived alone, the process of meeting new friends and establishing new relationships was important. Verbally sharing their experiences and exploring their own and other women's histories in a personal, subjective way were as significant as making new friends. The sharing of their experiences brought about an awareness of *their* individual and collective histories and, beyond that, the impact that women's history has on society.

The second workshop (Workshop B) was quite different from the first. It was held in a predominantly white and poor or working-class neighborhood. Most residents were second- or third-generation descendants of European immigrants. Expectations were that young mothers twenty to thirty-five years old, living alone or with a partner, would participate in a twelve-week workshop series. The emphasis for learning women's history would be instructive and experiential, and very few sessions would be devoted to oral history.

By and large, the women who live in this community are fairly isolated, and alone in facing those issues typical of their living environment. They are conditioned to feel powerless and helpless in relation to social, economic, and political systems, yet they are strong, lively women who are survival-oriented and who don't mince words. Child care is a constant worry for those women who have young children and work outside the home. For those who do not work outside the home, very little time is spent away from their children. In most cases, individual autonomous space is not even considered a possibility, or else women are made to feel guilty for taking some space of their own. Information about health care, birth control, abortion, and welfare rights is hard to come by; taking control of these issues is even more difficult. Oftentimes the women who are married are locked into a dependency relationship with their husbands; this, coupled with isolation, helps create the secrecy and helplessness around alcoholism, wife beating, and child abuse. Providing workshops on women's history that would be both educational and recreational was seen as one way to encourage these women to break out of their condition.

One of the main reasons for approaching this neighborhood was that very few educational services that deal specifically with women's lives and issues were available to these community women. Moreover, I personally felt comfortable going into this community because it was similar to the neighborhood in which I grew up. Contact for entry into this community was made with a newly established, community-based women's center. The staff was very enthusiastic and supportive of the project.

The original workshop plans to implement a twelve-session series on women's history for the young mothers of this community did not, however, materialize. Miscommunications and insufficient outreach were the major causes for this failure. Instead, two independent workshop events were presented as part of the center's overall outreach program. The women who attended these sessions were community residents, but their roots were not in this community and they did not have child-care responsibilities. Nonetheless, the two-event community outreach series successfully introduced women's history to these women.

ORGANIZING THE GROUPS

This section is intentionally written for women who are doing outreach work as outsiders to a community or group, but many of the issues discussed are also applicable to community-established workers. The issues include: deciding upon the groups of women you want to work with; finding agencies that may want to co-sponsor a workshop series; locating a meeting space; making initial contacts and final site selections; enlisting the support of agency staff; and generating publicity and outreach activities to attract community women. My feeling is that these community outreach organizing issues are as important as the workshops themselves. A description of how they evolved in the communities I worked in follows. You should speculate on how these issues might unfold in your community.

Contacts for the elderly women's group came about very easily. A community staff member learned about the workshop series through an informal discussion with our project coordinator. When I expressed interest in conducting workshops for elderly women at this site, arrangements were made for me to meet with the other agency staff members. They were enthusiastic, but needed a few days to make a final decision. Obviously, I got the go-ahead. Later I learned the agency was in a dilemma about this being a "women's" workshop and about having an offer from another organization to conduct individual interviews with its members. This dilemma is an interesting dynamic to review in relation to our initial interview. Both of these issues were briefly mentioned during the interview, but never to the point where they affected a decision. Since the staff did not clearly voice its concerns, I was not able to make any response. Not only was this disadvantageous for me, but we were both risking losses. Although I conducted the workshop series at this community site, I did not realize the controversial nature of the staff's decision-making process. To my mind, this incident is a good illustration of how an outsider and an agency staff begin to struggle with the issue of trust from the very first meeting. Also remember that it is not only agency staff that makes a decision from this interview process; you, too, have choices to make.

The decision to work with young, working-class mothers for the second workshop series seemed simple enough to carry out. I knew the women's center staff would probably be enthusiastic and supportive of the project. I did not realize, however, that outreach work in this particular community would prove to be as difficult as it was. Many serious miscommunications and unexpected problems kept delaying and redefining the workshop series.

For example, the center's decision-making body made a misinformed decision to include the workshops in its fall educational program. Because of the time restrictions of our project I had to withdraw the workshop proposal. Five weeks later a center staff member and I had the opportunity to talk about our mutual disappointment in not being able to offer the workshops at the center. During this discussion we realized that the staff representative who presented the women's history workshop proposal had not given the decision-making group all the needed information. It was clear I should have been present at that meeting to clarify points of confusion and to answer questions. The center's group had not realized my time restrictions, and was under the impression that the center would have had to do all the publicity and outreach work, for which it had neither the money nor the time. When I explained that there would be no financial expenses for the center and that I intended to do a good part of the outreach work, the staff member offered to have the proposal reviewed. The workshop proposal was accepted for immediate implementation a few weeks later; this was almost eight weeks from the original contact date.

150

The lessons to be learned from this incident are quite striking: do not treat your agency contacts too casually, or handle your proposal too informally. Also, be physically present at a meeting to answer questions and respond to any concerns—do not rely on the telephone. Eight weeks' time could have been saved if the proposal had been formally presented at the center's biweekly decision-making meeting.

Once a decision has been made about where the workshop series will be held, develop a closer working relationship with the agency staff. Especially enlist its support and cooperation for publicity and recruitment; and perhaps do some direct recruitment yourself. Your visibility and availability should deepen, if not establish, trust between you and the agency staff and potential workshop participants.

Working with the program staff coordinator at the center for the elderly was not only enjoyable, but invaluable and crucial to setting up the workshop series. She made phone calls to various community agencies and individuals and offered to distribute the flyers that I had printed. During this stage we maintained close contact with each other, both in person and over the phone.

Little time was actually spent in direct recruitment. It did not seem necessary in this case, but your situation may be quite different. Nonetheless, always check the progress of recruitment with the staff person. She may want you to do more of the recruiting work, or she may not be making enough contacts for your satisfaction.

There is a noteworthy incident, however, that occurred during the recruitment stage at the center for the elderly. Although the agency appeared to have a predominantly white membership I hoped the participants would represent different racial backgrounds. Through inquiries I learned that a Puerto Rican and Cuban women's group participated in the center's program. When I approached the leader of this group about the possibility of having some of the women attend the workshops, she informed me that they all spoke their native language exclusively. Because I and many other potential participants did not speak their language, there was no practical way for us to meet together.

This language barrier was an unexpected, painful and awkward issue to sort out. The incident reminded me of how language can be used discriminatorily. It also made me keenly aware of how language may not be considered when we are determining whom we want to work with, or in a general outreach program. Be sensitive to the issue of language, and keep in mind that you might want to have a workshop series exclusively for, or that includes, women who do not speak English as their first language.

The publicity and recruitment process with the women's center was somewhat different. A flyer was mailed to a substantial list of people whose names were supplied by the center, and was posted in laundromats and supermarkets. (You might also consider posting a flyer in churches, bowling alleys, and hairdressing shops, as well as making community newspaper and radio spot announcements.) There was good communication between the staff and me, but no time at all was spent intermingling with people at the center.

It was obvious from the first session at the women's center that the series would not get off the ground: four women attended. None represented the anticipated grass-roots, indigenous population; none were mothers; and only one woman would have been able to attend the workshop series to its end. To my mind, there are two main reasons for the failure of these workshops. First, I did not accurately assess the situation of the women's center outreach program. The center was recently founded and had not yet established a strong, visible identity in the community. Most of the community women had little or no interaction with the center and were probably ambivalent about its relevancy to them. Second, I did not realistically determine to what extent I should do outreach work. Moreover, by this time I was so eager for the workshop series to begin that I lost sight of summer being just around the corner—and summer is certainly not a usual time for mothers, or for anyone, to become involved in a twelve-week workshop series.

Rather than pull out of the community altogether, the staff and I agreed to present two single-event sessions in the fall. This decision was made to maintain continuity and perseverance in outreach efforts to this neighborhood; to tailor the workshops more closely to the center's overall educational outreach program; and to offer, as minimal as it might be, some exposure and introduction to women's history and women's oral history.

LEADING THE GROUPS

There are some general concerns about leading groups that can be most helpful if considered early on when planning for your workshops. These concerns primarily fall into three categories: your educational philosophy; your teaching approaches and methods; and your abilities as a facilitator to provide leadership for, and to be sensitive to, and aware of, many group issues.

The decade of the 1970's has blossomed with what has come to be known as women's studies. But to a large degree, women's studies has been controlled by and confined within the walls of academic institutions. This situation is not only unfortunate, but quite alarming, given that women's studies has its origin in the grass-roots women's movement. When academic institutions validate and seize hold of a subject matter, too often such actions are coupled with a sense of elitism and restriction, to the exclusion of community people. One group of community people who are discriminatorily excluded is women. Because knowledge is systematically withheld, women are kept powerless. This situation is something we cannot allow to happen over and over again. We must maintain and nourish that knowledge which originates from women's lives within grass-roots communities. Reclaiming knowledge about women for community women has been the major philosophic premise for this women's studies project.

My main thoughts about the educational process are that it should be available to everyone, it should not be a dull, boring learning situation, and it should enable people to make changes. If information is relevant to what people want and need to learn; if it has real connection to their lives and to society; if it does not perpetuate unjust, repressive systems and attitudes, then it is worthwhile—it becomes active and challenging.

The teaching approaches employed for the women's history workshop series are concerned with both experiential and instructive/expository learning. By incorporating historical information about women's lives with contemporary women's issues, these approaches create a learning situation that is immediately relevant and empowering. When discussion-oriented sessions utilize both personal sharing and outside resources, a stimulating education model is developed. This type of a learning situation can move us toward personal and social change. My opinion is that this model is feminist in nature. Examples of how the experiential and instructive/expository approaches were used in the workshops follow.

In the elderly women's workshops we went from an emphatically personal sharing phase, in which we verbally exchanged historical information about our lives, to a more instructive/expository phase, in which audiovisual and written materials were used. Of course, a balance of both personal and external resources was achieved during each session, but throughout the workshop series emphasis was consciously placed on one or the other. At the women's center each session maintained a balance of both aspects: outside resources were used initially and prepared us for the discussion and personal-sharing period that immediately followed. It is important to note here that while drawing from the self, we also went beyond the self—to social, economic, and political systems of society.

Be sure to work toward creating a supportive, non-intimidating and challenging atmosphere. Be attentive to the learning needs and wants of the participants; and make the sessions relevant. Oftentimes group leaders can become so immersed in the content that they lose sight of these aspects of the educational process. Search for that balance, which will differ from group to group, and maintain it. Remember that community women may be coming to a learning situation for the first time in a long while and may feel anxious about the new experience; do not alienate them by creating a typical classroom setting.

Both the twelve-week workshop series and the series of two single-event workshops were designed as self-contained, independent units. They are interrelated as a whole, but the self-containment is an important feature. It allows participants to miss a session, if necessary, and helps to include newcomers more easily.

Use simple, concise resources that will carry an impact and create engaging and manageable activities. Films, slide shows, photographs, artifacts, music, and short, readable written materials can be powerful. However, such materials should be selected carefully in relation to their appropriateness for your group and in relation to a participatory activity. For example, in one instance I used a written historical account of women's work. The information could have been distributed as a take-home handout or women could have read it individually in silence during the session. Instead, we read it aloud to one another, with the accepting option that women did not have to read if they did not want to. As it happened, all of the women wanted to read, and the content became actively engaging.

Consider as well the inappropriateness or feasibility of outside assignments. Community women often have pressures such as paid work, child care, housework, and poor health that prevent them from being able to undertake even short reading assignments. Do not overwhelm your participants. It may be that women will want and need some outside assignments, but this desire may occur only toward the middle or near the end of the series. Then again, the workshops may be part of an educational institution, in which case outside assignments would be appropriate.

The men were at first disgruntled by our request, but did grant us temporary and then permanent use of the room. The dynamics that occurred in the process of getting this space are important. First, the female members of the elderly community site did not have a room of their own to meet in, whereas the men did. Second, although the men grew to understand our need for a meeting space of our own, they did so in response to the tactful, assertive requests of the group participants. Third, my speculation is that these requests were no coincidence and that they were directly related to the workshop experiences. By the third session group members were keenly in touch with their roles and rights as women and as human beings, and were not about to be passive victims. Consequently, as a group we grew to realize our right to a comfortable, quiet meeting space.

Membership, another important group issue, does not form instantly if it is based on volunteer participation. Transiency and fluctuation are not uncommon, and membership stabilization will probably not occur until the third, fourth, or fifth meeting. Being in a calm, accepting place and working with this dynamic is one of the most crucial points to understand in working with groups. Remaining open and flexible about membership is important in forming any group. Some of the repetitive process necessary to introduce new women to the group may be extremely frustrating; however, the end results will be gratifying.

Membership in the elderly women's group did not stabilize until the fifth session. From then on it fluctuated between six and nine participants, but most often had eight in attendance. Approximately twenty women responded with interest to the workshop flyer; eight women, along with the agency staff person with whom I was working, attended the first session, held during the dead but stormy stage of winter. The small turnout of four women who attended the second meeting was quite alarming to me. Rather than panic about this small turnout, and despite my disappointment, I recalled that attendance tends to fluctuate for the first few meetings of any group. Attendance increased at subsequent meetings and, as previously mentioned, membership stabilized around the fifth session. It takes a few meetings for a group to establish its identity and solidify; thereafter little transiency will occur.

I want to stress that for this group-formation stage, keep in touch with every woman who attends a session. Do not badger women to attend, but try to discover why they are or are not coming to the meetings. Such follow-up provides personal contact, helps establish trust, and might aid in modifying the content of the workshop series.

You will need to be responsible for providing a certain amount of leadership, especially during the beginning of the series. For example, your initial role will probably be to offer a sense of purpose and direction, to help the women feel comfortable, to encourage them to talk and participate, and to monitor how long the women talk, whether or not others are being cut off, and if they are sticking to the topic. That degree of involvement should decrease after a few sessions, when exciting leadership will be provided by the participants themselves.

Termination is another given feature of a group's process. It essentially calls a halt to an ongoing experience that many people share together. Whether it has been a good or bad experience you should give yourself enough time to satisfactorily process and end your relationship with the participants; do not terminate abruptly. I was sensitized to the issue of termination during the very first session of the elderly women's workshop. One woman simply said that she was sad the workshops would only be twelve weeks. Ending or drawing closure to a situation is not an uncommon concern for elderly people. They must cope with death, loss, and subsequent loneliness more frequently now than in any other stage of life. Consequently, how the series ended was of utmost concern for me. Because we had all grown so close, established a lot of trust, caring, and respect, the end of the workshop series could have been traumatic. Perhaps precisely for these reasons and because the women wanted to continue, we never did end. Instead, we shifted to monthly meetings. We did, however, deal with the termination of our weekly sessions. By having a social potluck and evaluating the workshops, we were able to draw some closure to our experiences. This also helped free us to embark on the newly scheduled monthly meetings.

Beginnings, ends, membership, participation patterns, leadership, and meeting space concerns all occurred in the women's center series, but in a much different way. They emerged in a microcosmic form, contained within each of the two events in the series. It was an immediate, spontaneous process rather than a growing one. In cases where you are conducting one workshop only, you will need to deal quickly with these group issues as they arise.

Maintain contact with both staff and participants outside of the workshop series themselves and make yourself available beyond the workshop time, but be sure to draw boundaries. For example, in one instance a woman who never fully participated in the workshops had been mourning her husband's death for over a year. She very seldom left her house, had grown to be somewhat antisocial, and in the group often talked only about her husband. A few members suggested she go to a widow-support group. Knowing she was fairly shy, I offered to take her to that agency for the first time. I telephoned her a few times after that to see how she was doing, but drew a boundary beyond that point. Here I might note that with the consent of the group members you could create a participant address and phone list early in the series. This way all group members will be able to call each other if they want or need to.

Get to your sessions early, and check with the staff person to find out what the women's reactions were to the last session, or if there is something you should know about any of the participants. For example, during one of these check-in times, I learned that one of the participants had had to drop from the workshops because she was forced to move to another community. Check with the staff person after each session to let her know how the meeting went, what has been planned for the following week, and whether or not an agency staff person should do some follow-up services with a participant.

In conclusion, be open and flexible about your workshop plans and process. Provide content modifications for your sessions when necessary, always be prepared with alternative suggestions and resources, and be accessible to your participants and agency staff.

GROUP PROCESS AND DYNAMICS

Some factors common to the life process of every group include its beginning, end, and membership, leadership, and participation patterns. The members' ages, racial, ethnic and class backgrounds, and emotional/sexual preferences will contribute significantly to the group's dynamics, as will the meeting space. In the early life of a group, confidentiality and trust will be the most pressing concerns; later, membership stability, leadership, and termination will take on emphasis. How these and other group issues unfold differs from one group to another, as many of them occur simultaneously. You, as the facilitator, need to be attentive and sensitive to them all, and often provide leadership in dealing with them. Following is a discussion and description of some of these issues as they occurred in the series I conducted.

Begin working to establish trust immediately. The best way to do this is to be honest about who you are and what you are doing. Make the objectives or purpose of your project clear. If you are an outsider to the group you might find points of identification that will help break through group resistance or individual apprehensions. For example, when we shared our personal histories with each other during the first session with the elderly women, it became obvious that my class background was similar to the participants'. Because of this similarity I could sense greater acceptance and trust of me. The commonality of our backgrounds enabled us to quickly understand each other without explanation, and aided us in establishing an early rapport.

Confidentiality was also overtly discussed during this first session. The timing of this discussion was very important because we were to become intensely involved in a great deal of personal storytelling. Women were encouraged to discuss how they felt about confidentiality, and to make decisions about the boundaries they wanted to draw around personal information. Everyone agreed that permission should be sought for any use of information that went beyond the group. Your situation may differ, but it is an issue for early resolution.

Both confidentiality and trust were further tested during the second session when I raised the possibility of tape-recording the remaining sessions. The women were understandably apprehensive, yet enthusiastic about the idea. We talked about the importance of recording their personal histories, if only for preservation's sake; that is, we had no intention of doing anything whatsoever with the material, but were content in knowing that it was recorded. A verbal contract was made by all of us, stating that the tapes were the property of all participants and that if any member or non-member wanted to use the tapes, she or he would have to be granted permission by all the participants.

In addition to confidentiality and trust, meeting space will also affect the group's process early in its life. If possible, determine the meeting space before the workshop series begins. Although I had assumed we would have our own quiet, little room, the first, second, and third sessions of the elderly women's workshops were held in a large, noisy common room. This space created many disruptions during these first few sessions: people came and went, popping in and out of the circle to find out what was going on; a television blared in one corner of the room; men played pool in another corner; and three women who were ambivalent about joining us behaved in a rowdy manner nearby. It took a great deal of effort to concentrate amidst these permanent distractions. So, we made arrangements to hold our fourth session in the only meeting room in the entire building—interestingly, it was called the men's room.

The characteristics of the women you are working with—their ages, their racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, and emotional/sexual preferences—will also strongly influence the group's dynamics and workshop's content. For example, both of the groups I worked with were white; one working-class and the other a mixture of working- and middle-class. The isolation of this race and economic-class composition, however, did not mean that the historical experiences and current realities of women from different backgrounds were avoided. Quite the contrary. In each workshop series the women were exposed to and discussed Third World women's histories, racial attitudes and relations, and economic-class issues.

Given our similar racial and class identities, we were not able to gather, from women of different backgrounds, direct information about their rich histories and lives. A sense of immediate diversity was lost in this respect. Another group dynamic that surfaced from this situation is that our personal individual feelings, attitudes, and biases about women who are different from us did create some tensions. But, I would like to stress that experiencing and dealing with this kind of tension or conflict, although we may wish not to, is healthy and constructive. It moves us closer to dealing with differences in an open manner, and allows us to begin to change those attitudes that often create hostile polarizations.

Emotional/sexual preferences—lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual life styles—did not surface directly in the elderly women's workshops. They did, however, in the younger women's group where one participant was inquisitive about the history of lesbians. Her sense was that this information was too often hidden or withheld, and it was a subject she wanted to know more about. Because a single comprehensive resource on lesbian history does not exist, she was referred to a number of recently published materials that would be helpful for gaining insight on the historical experience of lesbians.

The age range of the groups differed drastically, and some interesting dynamics occurred because of our ages. For example, each of the groups responded to oral history differently. The elderly women very much focused on their personal histories, whereas the younger women were more interested in the histories of their grandmothers and mothers. And the difference between my age and that of the elderly women was much more obvious than it was in the younger women's group. One elderly woman made note of this in her written evaluation of my role: "At first I thought she was too young. She really drew us all out and was a very interesting person to participate with." Although age may not appear to be a crucial concern, many attitudes about how we view, treat, and feel about younger women, older women, and peers can surface. Age is another area in which we must consider both our differences and our similarities in an open, non-oppressive manner.

EVALUATING THE WORKSHOPS

An evaluation process will not only help check your perceptions about a workshop series, but you can benefit from the information by using it when you plan future workshops. The evaluation should attempt to include critical feedback from all persons involved—participants, agency staff, and yourself—in order to discover the successes and failures of the series. Evaluation topics might include what content and resources were useful, what worked, what did not, and why. Through the process many participants can acknowledge unsaid thoughts, feelings, and reactions, and can begin to develop skills for critically evaluating what they have learned and what they may want to learn in the future. Similarly, agency staff can determine the overall effectiveness of the workshop series within the framework of their program. Of course, no evaluation can discount or replace session-by-session and midpoint critiques. In and of itself, however, a final evaluation may have a greater impact because it provides a more comprehensive, hindsight response to the total workshop.

There are many ways to complete an evaluation. You could do it verbally, either as a group or individually, or you could develop a written questionnaire that would function as an evaluation form. I used both approaches, and much of the rationale for how I used these approaches had to do with the quality of my relationship with each group.

My relationship with the elderly women's group had more continuity and depth, and their experiences covered much more content over a longer period of time. Following is a sample of the questions I asked the participants in this group:

- What did you enjoy the most? What was the highlight of the workshop? Why?
- What did you like least in the workshop? Why?
- Rate the following things we have done in the workshop according to your preference what you liked best, beginning with #1. Then describe why #1 was the most important for you. (A list describing each session and some activities was provided.)
- If there were readings/handouts, were they useful? Why or why not?
- What parts of the workshop were unsatisfactory? Why?
- What would you like to see changed? added? taken out?
- What have you learned from the workshop that you didn't know before?
- Would you participate in another workshop of this kind? Why or why not?
- Were you satisfied with your facilitator? Why or why not? What did you like/dislike about her?
- Other comments, please.

The women's center series was based on two independent events where I had no ongoing relationship with the participants. It made most sense, therefore, to critique each session by itself and to do this verbally so as not to put the participants on the spot by asking them to complete a written questionnaire.

The staff at both community sites critiqued the workshop series. Following is a sample of the questions presented to the elderly center staff:

- Describe the relationship that was established between the workshop facilitator and yourself. Were the communication and contact satisfactory?
- Did the workshop fulfill your expectations? Why or why not?
- How did the workshop fit into your overall program?
- What impact did the workshop have on your community organization?
- What impact did you feel the workshop had on the women who participated in it?
- Would you be interested in having the workshop repeated? Why or why not?
- Do you have any suggestions for changes in the community outreach or workshop model?
- Additional comments and/or suggestions.

I cannot stress enough how important these participant and staff evaluations were to my overall assessment of the two workshop series. They helped me consider areas that I would probably have overlooked, and reconsider issues that I misperceived. For these reasons I strongly recommend that you complete a well thought out evaluation of your workshop series.

CONTENT

Workshop A

> We never get to sit down and talk with each other like this. We don't take the time.

The following workshop series was conducted with the elderly women's group over a twelve-week period; sessions averaged from two and one-half to three hours each. The workshop emphasizes personal, oral history. Women's history, as an inseparable facet of oral history, is consistently interwoven, but received less direct attention. Topics are explored in this workshop series primarily through storytelling—storytelling about how participants came to live in their community; about their grandmothers, mothers, and selves; about their paid and unpaid work experiences; and about their photographs and artifacts. Other activities include presentation of a slide show on women's history in the United States, group reading of a twelve-page historical account of women's work, viewing a documentary film about three women's lives during the 1930's, and writing a three- to eight-page family history that focuses on women. These family histories were read aloud and critiqued, and each woman's writing experience was discussed during two of the sessions, one of which was videotaped.

Session One: Women's Oral Traditions and Personal History

A. *Goals*

The goals of the first session were twofold:

1. For group members to become acquainted
2. For participants to be introduced to women's oral tradition/history

Some groups become more "rap"-oriented; others tend to avoid the personal and become more "study"-oriented. The first meeting is crucial for striking a healthy balance between the two and helps set the tone and direction for future sessions. Participants should connect equally with each other, with who they are, and with what they are about to learn. Some of the more specific objectives for this session are making history exciting and alive; helping the women become more comfortable with each other; beginning to establish a sense of openness and trust; helping participants recognize their similarities and differences; and dispelling myths about the nature of the workshops.

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Introduce yourself, and describe the purpose and goals of the workshop series and how and why you came to be there. Then ask participants to introduce themselves, talk about why they are there, and discuss what they expect from the workshops.

   Although the introductory activity appears simple, it is in fact complex. It demands your utmost attention. Always go first in this process. Participants, who are more vulnerable than you, should not immediately be put on the spot; they should have time to learn about you and what you are planning. You should also clarify any misconceptions about the series. For example, many of the women in my group imagined I was there to conduct individual interviews; it took time to convey a group approach to doing oral histories. This explanation may have been more threatening because of the vagueness about how we would proceed and the responsibility that each participant would have to assume, but it was worth it. Be honest and sincere about who you are and why you are there. I told participants about my learning and teaching involvement with women's history and oral history; about why I chose to do a workshop series emphasizing oral history with elder women; that I was being paid to do this work; and what our larger project was all about.

   Most of the participants were enthusiastic and friendly about meeting one another. They were visibly uncomfortable, however, when they described why they had attended the meeting. Specifics were difficult to come by: they wanted to know what the sessions were all about, were curious and interested, and did not have any expectations. To help the women feel less anxious, I moved on to an easier, more concrete activity that introduced women's oral history.

2. Ask participants to describe when and how they came to live in their community. This exercise will introduce them to personal, oral history and will begin to establish a historical sense of their lives. Participate equally in this activity, but do not go first this time. Give group members the opportunity to take their time, because you have already taken quite a bit in the first activity. This exercise works well. It is general, yet connected to an immediate experience that is engaging and informative. Participants can also easily determine just how much they want to say.

   One reason for the success of this activity is that its purpose was immediate, tangible, and concrete. Although I was not a resident of the participants' community, my story proved to be significant for gaining their trust. Recollections of my immigrant grandparents, poverty-stricken parents, and other life experiences identified my class background as similar to theirs. This was a powerful bonding force and made their acceptance of me easier. In many instances we were able to understand one another without explanation, in silence, because of our similarities.

   A wealth of historical information emerged during the second activity. Women who had immigrated to this country described their lives in Ireland and Nova Scotia; they talked about being poor but happy, living close to the soil and breathing fresh air. Some women repeated stories told to them by their Swedish and Scottish immigrant parents or grandparents. All expressed vivid memories of the first years in their community. Rooming houses were abundant; many of the women or their mothers worked as "kitchen canaries" (domestic helpers); funerals were held in the living room of their residences; and there were always extended-family gala events on Saturday nights. Yes, indeed, they were poor, but ". . . back then you didn't realize how poor you were . . . we thought most people were in the same situation." Although they were happy alongside their hardships, they also recognized in retrospect that they unknowingly lived in an isolated world. "I didn't know until later that people saw us as the poor and were prejudiced against us."

Other concrete issues arose for discussion during this activity. For example, when reference was made to living in an isolated neighborhood and about the prejudices toward poor, Catholic, and certain white ethnic groups, we talked about how the system creates ghettoes for keeping people separated, about the women's experiences, and about the current economic/racial discrimination toward Third World people. We also worked at defining what Third World meant. This was an exciting learning experience that also demonstrated the participants' sense of freedom and willingness to ask questions. Some of the discussion was difficult and tense because of differing attitudes toward non-white people. But it also seemed to be a very positive, constructive beginning for breaking through racial prejudices.

This session made me sharply aware of what my leadership role would be for this group. Little energy would have to be directed to keeping the women talking; they really enjoyed, wanted, and needed this special time to be with one another. Instead, I would have to keep the discussions focused and be conscious of time limitations. Even though we went beyond the allotted two hours, concluding was difficult. This session also helped me realize to what extent I needed to be flexible and open to revising the original workshop plans. Learning about the women's backgrounds helped focus the content and the resources I would use.

Alternative Activities. If you're already familiar with the group members, or have done enough preparatory work to learn about them, you can ask more specific questions or create more specific topics for the women to discuss. For example, you can ask if they know how their particular ethnic or racial group came to live in the area. Or you can ask if they want to discuss any particular historical period or topic, such as life during the Depression or their work experiences. You can also ask them to recount stories or songs that have been passed on to them by their mothers and grandmothers. Be sure to have enough historical information yourself to elaborate on whatever is being discussed, and keep the discussion as woman-oriented as you can.

Session Two, Three and Four: Creating Oral Histories
Our Grandmothers, Mothers, and Selves

The following three sessions were approached thematically. Women created essentially female family histories by storytelling. Each woman spoke about her grandmothers, her mother, and her role as mother, aunt, and/or non-blood-related nurturer in relation to children. This was an exciting and remarkably intense phase of the series in which we drew upon our own private, personal life experiences without using outside resource materials.

A. *Goals*

There were several goals for the three sessions:

1. To learn, experientially, what oral tradition/history is all about by doing it
2. To grasp and internalize a firm understanding of the important role oral history has in people's lives
3. To realize the unfortunate neglect of this primary source material by historians, and to analyze why and how it is neglected, especially with a concern for the unrecorded histories of common people

4. To get in touch with our female heritage—to consciously appreciate its significant value in relation to women's culture and history
5. To develop openness and trust among the group members

B. *Suggested Activities*

Session Two. Discuss memories of grandmothers, and recount stories, anecdotes, and songs that were passed on by grandmothers. It is important to begin this storytelling by going as far back as is comfortable: an historical sense or framework will be established; being slightly remote in personal immediacy will diminish fears of vulnerability; yet personal histories will be shared. These first stories begin to establish trust toward more intimate sharing in future sessions and begin to develop "recollecting" skills, which often lie dormant or are kept secretly within the confines of our own heads. As a few women remarked, "You can't imagine how much more I'm able to remember about my earlier life because of the thinking and talking this workshop has caused. There's so much information that has come to life that I'd forgotten about."

This session seemed a bit strenuous because the women were not in the habit of thinking and talking about their grandmothers. However, they were eager to share, to listen, and to learn from others. The real difficulty lay in how much information they were able to recall. One woman remembered having had very little interaction with her grandmother, because she spoke only English and her grandmother spoke only Polish. Nonetheless, she recalled the excitement in preparing for the many journeys to visit her grandmother. Another woman described incidents from the years she had lived with her grandmother during her late adolescence. She had felt very close to her and often thought her grandmother was more like a mother to her than her own mother had been. Not having known either of her grandmothers, another woman recollected the tragic story of her maternal grandmother's death. This story had been passed on to her during her childhood.

One way we expanded on the grandmother stories was by reflecting upon that particular historical period in which our grandmothers had lived. For example, when one woman talked about the memories of her grandmother riding a bicycle during the early part of this century, we were able to discuss the issues of women's health, exercise, and restrictive clothing during that time. In another instance we were able to discuss the experimental medical abuse of an immigrant grandmother, which had resulted in her death. This development of a historical context suggests how easily oral tradition and women's history work hand in hand. It also illustrates the necessity for you to be knowledgeable about women's history so that additional information can be supplied. This is a dynamic that will occur in each session.

Session Three. Discuss memories of participants' mothers and stories and anecdotes passed on by their mothers. The topic is more immediate and contemporary in the minds of the women and may be more emotional. This progression is fine, since participants will have grown closer to one another, become more open, and established higher trust levels. They also will be developing their skills for both conscious historical fact finding and personal sharing that should result in a comfortable, yet powerful, historical framework.

The most predominant issues that emerged during this activity were the relationships that each of us had with our mother, our mother's influence on our life; our feelings toward our mother; and roles that we played within the family in relation to our mother. For example, one woman had had an extremely good, open relationship with her mother and adored her; another had felt abandoned; another had felt restricted because she had constantly been reminded to behave as a "proper lady"; and another had acted as a mother in the place of her own ill mother. What this activity brought to the forefront was an openness to share differing experiences about our relationships with our mothers. It was so moving to participate in a situation where people appreciated and valued each others' experiences; where judgments were avoided, and where everyone was involved in drawing out historical data by asking direct questions.

To expand upon the personal "mother" theme and to make direct connections with women's history, you can talk about the condition of women during a particular time period; historical events that may have influenced a mother's behavior; and the dual or triple roles that a woman was often forced to take on as child bearer, mother, and worker inside and outside the home. You can also discuss the effect different movements, such as women's suffrage, racial equality, or labor organization, have had on women's lives.

Session Four. Have women describe and discuss their experiences as a mother, as an aunt, or in some other nurturing role in relation to children. Bear in mind that not all women are biological mothers or aunts, but that most do have a nurturing role or relationship with children—as a friend, acquaintance, teacher, nurse, and so on.

This was an appropriate subject for the elder women's group because all of the women were mothers or stepmothers. It was a natural progression for drawing closure to discussing very personal themes: woman's role as nurturer—as grandmother and as mother. Had we not discussed the participants' experiences as nurturers, they probably would have felt excluded or separated from the female heritage they had created thus far. This discussion was also an excellent opportunity for the women to recognize the oral traditions they themselves have created and how they have made and are making women's history.

Women talked about the number of children and grandchildren they had, what it was like to give birth at home, what raising or having relationships with children meant to them, the effect of working outside the home while having young children, and the choices they did or did not have about bearing children. It was a very animated discussion in which history was immediate and alive.

Alternate Activities for Sessions Two, Three and Four. You could use a chronological approach to gather information about the women's lives during childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and adulthood. Or you could ask women to discuss their work experiences, as women, during these four life stages. Whatever you choose to do should be well thought out, and the emphasis should be on personal history-sharing.

Session Five: The Historical Significance of Photographs

A. *Goals*

The goals of this session were twofold:

1. To disengage participants from an emphasis on their personal histories
2. To learn concrete facts about women's history with the aid of outside materials

It was a good time for this transition, because we were all exhausted from the unexpected intensity of the first four sessions. Nevertheless, the experiential exposure to oral tradition and history had made us eager to learn more about women's history.

B. *Suggested Activity*

Have women bring significant old and contemporary photographs they want to show others and talk about. This activity is a wonderful combination of using external resources, while maintaining contact with personal histories. It proved to be an excellent transitional tool.

There were few but poignant tintype photos dating back to the 1890's and early 1900's. These treasures portrayed a mother working in a hat factory, a bicyclist, and many female and family-type portraits. Many other photos dated to the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's, when the participants were children, adolescents, young adults, and adults. The more contemporary photos were of children and grandchildren. Again, this activity was interlaced with comments and speculations about women's history during these decades.

It is difficult to describe accurately the excitement and joy with which we shared these photographs. It was very personal and real, and the amount of historical information that flourished during this session was amazing. This activity certainly is evocative and should be included in any workshop on women's oral history/women's history.

Alternate Activities. Many sources are not used to their full potential for documenting women's history. In addition to photographs, music, art, poetry, artifacts, and other cultural items can be included. Any one of these cultural aspects can initiate an engaging activity that would combine both personal experiences and outside resources. This combination can enable you to make an easier transition to using predominantly resources that are not based on personal experience.

For example, women are often engaged in needlework arts, such as crocheting, quilting, embroidery, and petit point. Have the women bring in items that have been made by female friends or relatives or by themselves. Discuss what they know about these art works, their experiences in creating them, or the role such work plays in women's lives. This type of exercise will illustrate the significant effect cultural items have in making women's history.

Another option would be to complement the photographs by bringing in photographic essay books that deal with a specific time or a specific subject matter such as needlework arts, women's history, or women's work.

Sessions Six, Seven, Eight and Nine: A Look at Women's History— An Overview, Women's Work, and Oral History in Documentary Film

A. *Goals*

This section places more emphasis on gaining a historical overview of women's history. The general goals are:

1. To provide women with instructive situations in which they can learn facts about women's history
2. To make this history come alive
3. To establish connections between personal histories and concrete historical information
4. To analyze women's history in relation to society at large
5. To make connections between the past and the present

I used audiovisual and written materials to stimulate this learning process. Over the next four sessions we saw a slide show on women's history in the United States; read a historical account of women's work; discussed our paid and unpaid work experiences; and saw a documentary film about three women's lives in the 1930's.

B. *Suggested Activities*

Session Six. The purpose of this meeting was to familiarize women with an overview of women's history. This overview should especially illustrate the diversity within women's culture: our various roles; age, race, class, and emotional/sexual backgrounds; and the many movements in which we have participated. Because history can often be dry, it was crucial for me to find a resource and to create an exercise that would actively draw women into a lively body of knowledge.

Show the slide show on women's history in the United States.[1] It dates from colonial times to the present, reflects the diversity of women, includes a narrative script and can be practically used within a one- to three-hour workshop. Encourage responses and comments while viewing the show, instead of waiting until the end. Spontaneous responses are a much better way of getting women involved in the content. Be sure you preview the show for your own familiarity and to get a sense of where and how you can interject additional information.

The slide show elicited more response and interest than expected; the activity took a full three hours. Sometimes the women asked specific questions or were given specific information about historical events or periods. At other times, the content stimulated participants to comment about what they saw on the screen.

For example, slides of Native American women and life prompted a few of the women to talk about the mistreatment and killing of Native Americans by white settlers. In a brief section dealing with the birth control movement and a pioneer birth control advocate, Margaret Sanger, the women talked about their vague remembrances of that movement. The existence of birth control clinics and the inaccessibility or accessibility of such vital information was discussed. We next explored a controversial issue about women's reproductive rights: abortion. Some women recounted the hush-hushness and inaccessibility of information about abortion, told how acquaintances or friends went about getting an abortion, and speculated about which women did and did not get an abortion during the 1920's and 1930's.

Some of the slides depict the enslavement of African-American women. The connections between slavery and sexual controls raised the issue of sexual violence against Afro-American women by white plantation owners and the current sterilization abuse of Third World women in this and other countries.

The slides of the 1920's and 1930's evoked tremendous comment because these years were a particularly significant time in the women's lives. Many were newly married and raising children during the Depression. They described giving birth to children at home; the positive, helpful role of the visiting nurses; and the health care services provided by well-baby clinics. Apparently these clinics not only provided health care, but served as an informal social center where women visited with each other—providing a much-needed outlet for women who had recently become mothers.

The slide show also depicted the various roles women have played throughout history—interpreters, colonial homemakers, spies, nurses, military strategists and commanders, pioneers, skilled and unskilled paid workers, and activists/leaders in various movements. It was especially inspiring to recognize unusual roles, to acknowledge that women do make choices to do non-traditional work and do make choices to not marry. The latter choice was particularly important for me, as I was the only unmarried woman in the group; it prompted women to acknowledge and appreciate my choice, and it encouraged one woman to talk enthusiastically about an unmarried daughter.

---

[1] *And Ain't I A Woman? A History of Women in the United States from 1600 to the Present,* produced by Deirdre Delaney, Mary Fastaband, and Leona Pollack. See the Resources section, pp. 159–169, for ordering information.

The slide show was effective; women were eager to learn more about women's history, and at this point the trust level made it easy to comment and ask questions. I do not think the slide show would have been as effective if it had been presented earlier in the series.

Alternate Activity for Session Six. Although I strongly recommend using this slide show, you might want to emphasize a particular aspect or theme in women's history: for example, women's work, labor organizing, union organizing; independence; aging; regional history; or ethnic/racial history. In addition to the resources listed at the end of this chapter, your local libraries, women's organizations, or women's resource lists might provide further suggestions.

Sessions Seven, Eight, and Nine. One of the goals for these sessions is to have the women more closely explore one aspect of women's history. Other goals are to introduce participants to written materials on women's history; to help them realize the amount of information that does exist on any one area in women's history; and to integrate life experience with learning women's history. This last objective is valuable, if only to demonstrate the possibilities for delving into a specific topic or time period. We chose to concentrate on women's work.

Session Seven. Rotate reading aloud to one another the brief, but dramatic historical account of women's work.[1] Having everyone read a paragraph or excerpt involves all participants equally in contributing to the learning process. Interject comments and responses during, rather than after, the reading. Be sure to take enough time for completing this activity. Not only is there a tremendous amount of historical information to digest and discuss, but everyone's reading pace and ability vary.

Within the realm of women's work, you may decide to explore only one aspect: women's housework, motherhood, or needlework arts. Or you may choose to focus on the paid work the women have performed. Use written materials that are fairly short, readable, and understandable.

Session Eight. Have women discuss their paid and unpaid work experiences. Let them know about this activity at the end of the preceding session so they will have time to think about the topic. The objectives of this exercise are to define what women's work is; to validate all women's work experiences; and to analyze women's work contributions to society. The discussion will take on greater significance when the group begins considering women's unpaid work in the home—an instance in which women's work is often taken for granted or viewed not as work, but as women's inherent role. In discussing the paid labor force, you should consider the use of women as cheap laborers or as fill-ins during worker shortages.

We decided to devote this session entirely to our paid and unpaid work experiences, because we did not feel we had satisfactorily completed the discussion in the preceding session. More than three hours were spent describing housework, child rearing, and various paid work situations. Women were able to recognize ways in which their work had been undervalued or taken for granted. Some of the women's paid work experiences included gas station attendant, hair dresser, laundry worker, machinist, nurse, registered optician, factory card sorter, and parish church helper. Because women do take on or are forced into non-traditional work roles, you might want to interject that during colonial times women were printers, tavernkeepers, and so on, and that in wartime women do many male-identified jobs.

Many women remembered having been frustrated about their paid work situation because their husbands had not wanted them out working—"woman's place is in the home." One woman vividly recalled the obsessive jealousy and control shown by her husband. The couple eventually divorced, and she described her divorce as the beginning of a time when she "could breathe again." The women also identified their experiences in the paid labor force as having provided some independence (financial and otherwise), regardless of the triple work roles they may have had to play as homemaker, child rearer, and paid worker.

---

[1] Anne Froines, *Women's Work Is Never Done* (Somerville, Massachusetts: New England Free Press, 1972).

This session helped shed a new light on women's paid and unpaid work experiences, particularly as women's work contributes to society as a whole.

Session Nine. This session provides a transition to shift the emphasis of the workshop series back to personal histories. The presentation of a film was used to accomplish this transition.

Show *Union Maids,*[1] a documentary film about women's union organizing in the 1930's. The interviews with and commentary by three remarkable women drew participants into the joys and realities of their work and life struggles. For this session, the film provided continuity with the theme of women's work; it was about women's lives and illustrated how women's oral histories could be used to create tangible projects. What became relevant and striking to the participants was the film's portrayal of three ordinary women communicating their experiences through storytelling. These women were doing oral history on film, and that was an exciting visual reality.

The various themes in this documentary film make it appropriate for many purposes. You can use it to emphasize women's work; labor and union organizing (for example, the development of the CIO union in the 1930's); work conditions, pay, and roles; the relationship women have had with male-dominated unions; women's history in general; and other issues. Labor and union organizing was not a point of identification for participants in these workshops. That women received unequal pay for their work, and were treated as secondary citizens by men, did become a common ground for identification.

When making connections about the filmed oral histories and those which evolved in the workshop series, one woman commented, "This workshop is so great. We never get to sit down and talk with each other like this. We don't take the time." The importance of creating and preserving oral history was not immediate in the minds of everyone. I then suggested that the group write a three- to eight-page female-focused family history over the next two or three weeks which ultimately turned into a booklet. As a group, we could put in writing what we had discussed in earlier sessions; create something for ourselves; and have something that could be passed on to others. My suggestions included plans to read the histories to one another, to critique them, to revise them if necessary, and to discuss the writing experience. The histories would then be typed and put together in booklet form—all within the next several sessions.

Everyone was excited about doing the project, but also apprehensive about the actual writing. After spending some time discussing the anxieties and insecurities that often accompany the writing experience, we decided to go ahead with the project. Two articles were then distributed to encourage and guide the women. One article was a short, stimulating newspaper account of family history; the other was a brief local community newspaper account of a "common" woman's memories of her grandmother.

---

[1] *Union Maids: A Documentary about Women Organizing in the 1930's,* produced by Julia Reichert, James Klein, and Miles Mogulescu. See the Resources section, pp. 159–169, for ordering information.

The film *Union Maids* proved to be invaluable in getting us back to oral history. Other resources can be oral history booklets that are part of a community project or excerpts from oral history anthologies that have been published for the general public. Personally, I think films are a stronger, more moving force. Perhaps you could complement a film with examples of written works.

Sessions, Ten, Eleven, and Twelve: The Creation of an Oral History Booklet

A. *Goals*

Refer to the general goals for this chapter (pp. 133–135).

B. *Suggested Activities*

Sessions Ten and Eleven. Have the women write and read aloud their histories, comment on one another's work, and discuss the writing experience. Because one of our sessions was postponed, we had two weeks to write the three- to eight-page history. Keep the writing assignment manageable so it does not become overwhelming. Consider, too, that this is not a writing-skills workshop, and, in our case, the work was not being published. Consequently, we were happy with and quite accepting toward each written contribution as it was submitted. I am sure the project would have been difficult if we had intended to publish the oral histories.

During these sessions, each participant read her history aloud and received immediate feedback from other members about the content, specifically about information that seemed missing or repeated. One woman, who did not feel comfortable about her English-language writing skills, wrote her history in Italian. Her granddaughter then translated the work into English. The women found it refreshing to recapture the information shared in earlier sessions. And they were genuinely thrilled by their success in writing the stories. This entire activity took one and a half sessions. During the last half of the eleventh meeting, we discussed our writing experiences as a group. This session was videotaped, which added still another dimension to the project. The women had never been videotaped, some had never seen videotape equipment, and chances were that this tape might be used to illustrate the creativity behind women's writing and/or the creation of women's oral history.

The oral histories were typed and put together in inexpensive but attractive folders (8½ by 11 inches, colored cardboard, hole-punched). Each woman received the original copy of her history, plus a collection of everyone else's. Having the original typed copy enabled each woman to photocopy her history if she wanted to pass it on to her children, grandchildren, other relatives, and friends.

Alternate Activity. What alternatives could you plan? This type of project, depending on its objective, can take as long as twelve to twenty-four weeks to complete, or even longer. Remember, we had a few postponements, which gave us an additional two weeks to complete a limited product outside of our meeting times. If your workshops are entirely devoted to oral histories, such a short time may be of little concern. You may also decide that you would like the histories published. If so, check with local community organizations and funding sources for financial assistance. Or you may want to create a slide show or a film, depending on the resources, skills, and time available. There are many exciting and worthwhile possibilities for developing oral history projects. The crucial point is to act upon the urgency for preserving women's histories.

Session Twelve. The purpose of the final meeting is to celebrate the work accomplished together; to evaluate the workshop content and process; and to sensitively draw an end to the weekly meetings.

Plan a comfortable, low-key party so women can socialize with each other, yet continue to do some work. Have women bring in artifacts they would like to talk about and show others; distribute the oral history booklets as a concrete product and remembrance of the workshops; create sufficient time to evaluate the workshop series; and have everyone talk about what it means for the workshops to be ending.

This last session was very well attended. There were many loose ends to tie, and it was clear that we really did not want to leave each other. Much pride and many good feelings were in the air when the booklets were distributed. We talked about what it meant for us to have such a visible product in our hands. Afterward, we ate sumptuous desserts that the women had made, toasted each other with champagne or soft drinks, and talked about the artifacts that were brought in. Hand-laced items, a family-tree painting, an old table crumber, a door stop, and photographs were among the treasures.

The ending of a group's life is very significant to each individual member, and termination can be a very disturbing issue to resolve during this last meeting. There are many ways in which closure can be handled, but in any event, be sure the issue is not avoided.

A description of the workshop series for the younger group, at the women's center, follows. Given that it was designed as two independent outreach events, it is much shorter in length. It would be especially appropriate to review if you have a very limited amount of time to conduct a workshop or if you want to present a single event as part of a general outreach program. You can also refer to the activities described in Workshop A for expanding the series to match whatever time frame you are working in.

Workshop B

Session One: An Overview of Women's History

A. *Goals*

The goals of this session are:

1. To introduce participants to women's history in the United States
2. To discuss what women's history is
3. To critique its status from a feminist perspective
4. To encourage women to learn more about their history

B. *Suggested Activity*

Show the women's history slide show *And Ain't I A Woman,*[1] encouraging comments and questions during the viewing. Afterward discuss and critique women's history with participants. Finally, distribute a short take-home article on women's history and one on women's oral history, as well as a one-page bibliography on each of these subjects, so that the women can easily explore futher resources if they choose.

This slide show is an effective means of providing concrete facts about women's history in a simple, non-intimidating manner. This particular slide show can easily capture the interest of the participants about an overwhelming subject that covers a span of over 350 years; in fact, using any audiovisual medium is the quickest, easiest, and most effective way of providing an overview of women's history to a group. If *And Ain't I A Woman* is not accessible, you may want to create your own resources. For example, there are a number of phonograph records and photographic essays on women's history that might be as functional; you could combine them or use them independently. Or if an opaque projector is available, you might select specific photographs for projection onto a wall and provide commentary or music.

---

[1] *And Ain't I A Woman? A History of Women in the United States from 1600 to the Present,* produced by Deirdre Delaney, Mary Fastaband, and Leona Pollack. See the Resources section, pp. 159–169, for ordering information.

To ensure a more involved discussion and critique of women's history, you could make written materials available to participants before the session. I found that trying to define women's history and critique its status called for more leadership on my part than I had expected. This is not an unusual circumstance when you are working with a group that has not had previous exposure to women's history. Nor is it uncommon to experience difficulty when you are trying to avoid rhetoric while doing this. Mention in your publicity that handouts are available at a particular place. Be aware, though, that written materials can symbolize a kind of involvement that potential participants do not want; consequently, handouts could discourage them from attending the session.

Session Two: Women's Oral History

A. *Goals*

The goals of this session are:

1. To introduce women's history
2. To underscore and discuss its value
3. To encourage participants to collect and create oral histories

B. *Suggested Activity*

Show the film *Union Maids*[1] and request that participants pay particular attention to what the women are doing: that is, the women in the film are storytelling about their lives and are thereby creating an oral history documentary film. This film will undoubtedly stimulate participants to consider the significance of women's oral traditions and history. Follow the film with a discussion about women's oral history. Then distribute the articles on women's history and women's oral history, and a bibliographic sheet on each of these subjects.

Participants can easily become engaged in any number of issues that provokingly emerge from viewing this film. An oral history method is used to produce the documentary, but it is not highlighted as a theme. Consequently, you will have to stress your theme—women's oral history—to the women.

The nine women who attended this session thoroughly enjoyed the film, which was followed by a lively discussion of women's oral history. Most of the women felt that they were able to understand women's lives and oral traditions in a new light. The value of collecting women's oral histories had quite an impact. Women expressed an eagerness to learn more about their grandmothers, mother, great-aunts, and aunts. One woman was already involved in collecting the histories of many female relatives. She was not recording the histories in any form, however, but now thought she would begin to. Another woman was very interested in specific topics, like birth control, but felt the subject was taboo to her grandmother. This led to a brief discussion of the interview process itself—how it is planned and conducted and, in this case, how one might indirectly get to a particular issue. My impression was that these women were genuinely interested in conducting interviews and collecting oral histories and that they would probably follow up this session by reading the handouts.

---

[1] *Union Maids: A Documentary about Women Organizing in the 1930's*, produced by Julia Reichert, James Klein, and Miles Mogulescu. See the Resources section, pp 159–169, for ordering information.

Besides *Union Maids*, there are a few other films listed in the Resources section that emphasize the importance of women's oral traditions and history. You could also play tape-recorded excerpts of interviews that have already been completed and could even conduct some interviews yourself in preparation for this workshop.

The two sessions described, individually and combined, raise a number of concerns for presenting independent workshops. On the one hand, presenting a single workshop does not provide enough time for depth and for response to written materials. Nor does it establish content and group continuity that would enable participants to grasp a firmer hold and understanding of women's history. On the other hand, there may not be enough time or participant interest to develop a longer series. Certainly, the advantage to a necessarily short workshop is that any exposure to women's history is more valuable than none at all.

CONCLUSION

Each of the workshop series in their unique content, structure, and process, successfully introduced women's history to community women. The workshops were well-received and well-evaluated by participants and agency staff, and had noticeable impact on the participants' lives.

The women who participated in the women's center workshop series responded favorably to the content and format. Their overall evaluations were brief and low key, but positive. Most women said they learned a great deal from the women's history slide-show session. The film and subsequent discussion of the second session carried much more depth and interest. Participants appeared to be excited about oral history, its value, the role it plays in women's lives, and the need to gather oral histories. One woman remarked:

> My grandfather always tells stories, with my grandmother quietly sitting in the background. This [session] has helped me realize the importance of her life . . . the need I have to learn more about her and draw her out.

The elderly center workshop series was much more substantive and dynamic, and the women responded positively to their experiences. One woman wrote that "getting to know each other and having all our memories come forth" was what she enjoyed the most. Another woman said:

> . . . all of the program was interesting, entertaining, and later very thrilling. [It helped me] to realize that events, which were common to your life, became real, and had volume to them . . . that the stories told to you were a real life for your Mother, and you could almost feel . . . how Mama was feeling

> when she told us the things she remembered. It made me realize more strongly the solid sense of that far-off time. Talking of 'Those Days' became so real that automatically you searched your memory for other bits of lore.

Everyone said she would participate in another workshop series of this kind. One woman indicated that:

> [I] was beginning to feel a loss of sincere attention paid to [my] former years, [I] allowed the "life of the minute" to take too strong a hold on [my] "life appreciation as it was," which [I am] now beginning to be sorry not to know more deeply.

Needless to say, the workshops conducted with the elderly women were an enormously wonderful experience for everyone. The vitality and information that these women brought to the sessions were beautiful and rich. And yet, it is amazing that these women are often ignored in our society simply because they are elderly and women.

A staff person at that community site was very aware of the importance of these workshops for the elderly women. As she said:

> In my opinion, the workshop succeeded in making each of them feel that they really have lived worthwhile lives—that each one in her own way contributed to society, and was active in her community and civic organizations. They had negative views previous to the workshop. They all now feel very positive about their life styles and themselves. They feel their families show even more respect toward them.
>
> I really cannot say enough about the workshop and do it justice. (She) helped each senior to feel proud of her life and to no longer have negative attitudes about her former years.

Both of these workshop experiences were very important to me. Finally, I felt like I was in a teaching situation I wanted to be in. I was able to share my passion for women's history with women whom I especially wanted to share it with—community women. I strongly urge you to follow your interest if you are inclined to do a similar workshop series. As you know, options for workshop content and structure are endless. By trusting yourself, by being imaginative, assertive, and sensitive, you will undoubtedly be successful in your endeavors.

I especially want to thank all of the community women I have come to know this past year—for being open about sharing and learning women's history. You have given so much to me; we have given so much to each other.

RESOURCES

The following resources only begin to scratch the surface of women's history materials that are available. Although some of the sources are contemporary in their historical relevance, the majority offer greater historical distance. Nine categories are used to enable more practical use of this Resource section. They include:

- Resources used in these workshops
- Women's history: general (this is subdivided into two categories: one category contains overview works; the other, works of neglected groups of women)
- Bibliographic resources
- Oral history
- Films and slide shows
- Photographic essays
- Music: books and records
- Poetry
- Art

Most of the works are not cross-referenced, and tremendous categorical overlaps exist. For example, some of the oral history and materials of neglected groups of women could easily be included under Women's History: General, but are not. Consequently, if you are looking for a specific reference you should review all related categories. Another point of consideration is that many of the listed books are expensive. What you might do in this instance is request that your local library order the book or audiovisual material for you.

RESOURCES USED IN THESE WORKSHOPS

And Ain't I A Woman? A History of Women in the United States from 1600 to the Present. Slide show, 15 minutes, narrative script and teacher's guide included. Produced by Deirdre Delaney, Mary Fastaband, and Leona Pollack. Available for rental or purchase from the producers at P.O. Box 730, Boston, Massachusetts 02102. 1979.

Bloom, Lynn Z. "Listen! Women Speaking." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies.* Women's Oral History Issue. Vol. II, No. 2 (Summer 1977), pp. 1–2. Available from Women's Studies Program, Hillside Court 104, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309.

Carpinelli, Elaine. "My Italian Grandmother, Theresa." *Neighborhood Woman,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (November/December 1977), pp. 4–5. Newspaper published by the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, 11–29 Catherine Street, Brooklyn, New York 11211.

Fink, Marcy. "Women in History Books: The Case of the Missing Sex." *High School Women's Liberation Pamphlet,* 1976, pp. 22–25. Available from Youth Liberation, 2007 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104.

Froines, Anne. *Women's Work Is Never Done: A Dramatic Reading on the History of Working Women in America.* Somerville, Massachusetts: New England Free Press, 1972. Available from New England Free Press, 60 Union Square, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143.

Gluck, Sherna. "What's So Special about Women? Women's Oral History." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies.* Women's Oral History Issue. Vol. II, No. 2 (Summer 1977), pp. 3–5. Available from Women's Studies Program, Hillside Court 104, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309.

McCain, Nina. "Family Histories Are Her Passion: Tamara Hareven Bridges the Gap between Sociology and History as Very Few Do." *Boston Sunday Globe,* April 15, 1979.

Union Maids: A Documentary about Women Organizing in the 1930's. 16 mm, black-and-white, 48 minutes. Produced by Julia Reichert, James Klein, and Miles Mogulescu. Rental and purchase available from New Day Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey 07417.

WOMEN'S HISTORY: GENERAL

Two subcategories have been created in an attempt to make this section manageable and practical. One subcategory includes works that present a historical overview of some groups of women since colonial times to the present, or works that examine a specific topic or time period. The greatest concern about these works is that they are primarily about white women, often in the middle or upper-middle class. This is not "bad" history, in and of itself, but its limitations must be kept in perspective. The second subcategory includes works about neglected groups of women—Afro-Americans, Appalachians, Asian-Americans, European immigrants, Latin Americans, lesbians, and Native Americans.

Many, many other works that fall into these two subcategories are not included because of time and space limitations. The resources that have been selected, however, can be supplemented by reviewing the bibliographic source books listed in the next section. Most of the resources are general in nature, and more books than articles are listed. The introductions to many of the books can be used as excellent, shorter overviews of women's history, either for your own explorations or as workshop resources and handouts.

Overviews

Banner, Lois. *Women in Modern America. A Brief History.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

Baxardall, Rosalyn, et al., eds. *America's Working Women: A Documentary History from 1600 to the Present.* New York: Random House, 1976.

Beard, Mary R. *Women as a Force in History.* New York: Collier Books, 1973 (1946).

____________, ed. *America through Women's Eyes.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1976 (1933).

Brown, Charlotte; Paula Hyman; and Sonya Michel. *The Jewish Woman in America.* New York: New American Library, 1977.

Cott, Nancy, ed. *Root of Bitterness.* New York: Dutton and Company, 1972.

____________. *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman's Sphere in New England, 1780–1835.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

Fink, Marcy. "Women in History Books: The Case of the Missing Sex." *High School Women's Liberation Pamphlet* (1976), pp. 22–25. Available from Youth Liberation, 2007 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104.

Flexner, Eleanor. *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States.* Revised edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975.

Froines, Anne. *Women's Work is Never Done: A Dramatic Reading on the History of Working Women in America.* Somerville, Massachusetts: New England Free Press, 1972. Available from New England Free Press, 60 Union Square, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143.

Gurko, Miriam. *The Ladies of Seneca Falls: The Birth of the Women's Rights Movement.* New York: Schocken Books, 1976. Includes 34 illustrations.

James, Edward T., and Janet Wilson James, eds. *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.

Kraditor, Aileen, ed. *Up from the Pedestal.* New York: Quadrangle Books, 1970.

Lerner, Gerda. *The Female Experience: An American Documentary.* Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1977.

____________. *The Woman in American History.* Lexington, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1971.

Rossi, Alice S., ed. *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to De Beauvoir.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1973. Also Bantam Books, 1974.

Sochen, June. *Herstory: A Woman's View of American History.* New York: Alfred Publishing Company, 1974.

Wertheimer, Barbara Mayer. *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.

Neglected Women's Groups

Afro-Americans

Bert, James Loewenberg, and Ruth Bogin. *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.

Browne, Martha (Griffith). *Autobiography of a Female Slave.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1979 (New York, 1857).

Cade, Toni, ed. *The Black Woman: An Anthology.* New York: Signet, 1970.

Escott, Paul D. *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978. A selection of slave narratives collected by the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930's.

Harley, Sharon, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds. *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images.* Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1978.

Jones, Bessie. *Step It Down.* New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976. About slave songs and games learned from the author's grandparents.

Lerna, Gerda, ed. *Black Women in White America.* New York: Random House, 1973.

Russell, Michele. "Black-eyed Blues Connection" *Women's Studies Newsletter,* Vol. 4, No 4 (Fall 1976); Vol. 5, Nos. 1 and 2 (Winter/Spring 1977).

Smith, Barbara. "Doing Research on Black American Women." *The Radical Teacher* (November 1976).

____________, and Beverly Smith. "I Am Not Meant to Be Alone and without You Who Understand: Letters from Black Feminists, 1972–78." *Conditions: Four,* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 1979). Available from *Conditions,* P.O. Box 56, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

Appalachians

Hagood, Margaret Jarman. *Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman: Mothers of the South.* New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1977 (1939).

Kahn, Kathy. *Hillbilly Women.* New York: Avon, 1974.

Southern Exposure, Special Issue: *Generations. Women in the South,* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter 1977). Available from P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

These Are Our Lives. As told by the people and written by members of the Federal Writers' Projects of the Works Progress Administration in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. New York: Norton and Co., 1939.

Asian-Americans

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts.* New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

European Immigrants

Brown, Charlotte; Paula Hyman; and Sonya Michel. *The Jewish Woman In America.* New York: New American Library, 1977.

Seller, Maxine. "Beyond the Stereotype: A New Look at the Immigrant Woman, 1800–1924." *The Journal of Ethnic Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 1975).

Latin Americans

Lavrin, Asuncion. *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978.

Longauex y Vasquez, Enriqueta. "The Mexican American Woman." In *Sisterhood Is Powerful.* Edited by Robin Morgan. New York: Vintage, 1970.

Lorenzana, Noemi. "La Chicana: Transcending the Old and Carving Out a New Life and Self-Image." *De Colores: A Journal of Emerging Raza Philosophies,* Vol. 2, No. 3 (1975).

Sanchez, Rosaura, and Rosa Martinez Cruz, eds. *Essays on* La Mujer. Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Center Publications, University of California Press, 1977.

Sutherland, Elizabeth. "Colonized Women: The Chicana—An Introduction." In *Sisterhood Is Powerful.* Edited by Robin Morgan. New York: Vintage, 1970.

Zinn, Maxine Baca. "Chicanas: Power and Control in the Domestic Sphere." *De Colores: Journal of Emerging Raza Philosophies,* Vol. 2, No. 3 (1975).

Lesbians

Cook, Blanche W. "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastmen, Emma Goldman." *Chrysalis,* No. 3 (1977).

Foster, Jeannette. *Sex Variant Women in Literature.* Oakland, California: Diana Press, 1975.

Katz, Jonathan. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* New York: Macmillan-Crowell, 1976.

Klaich, Dolores. *Woman plus Woman.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.

Martin, Del, and Phyllis Lyon. *Lesbian/Woman.* New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1972.

Miller, Isabelle. *Patience and Sarah.* New York: Fawcett Publications, 1973.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn 1975).

Native Americans

Katz, Jane, ed. *I am the Fire of Time: The Voices of Native American Women.* New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977.

Lanes, Ruth. *The Ojibwa Woman*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971.

Lurie, Nancy, ed. *Mountain Wolf-Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961.

Niethammer, Carolyn. *Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977.

Pearce, Roy. "A Melancholy Fact: The Indian in American Life." In *The Indian in American Life*. Edited by Francis Paul Prucha. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Bibliography on Women's History (1976-1979). Published by the Conference Group on Women's History, 1979. Available from CCWHP, c/o Nupur Chaudhuri, 1737 Vaughn Drive, Manhattan, Kansas 66502.

Common Women Collective. *Women in U.S. History: An Annotated Bibliography, 1976*. Available from 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

Haber, Barbara, ed. *Women in America: A Guide to Books, 1963–75*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978.

Hispanic Women and Education: An Annotated Bibliography. Available from WEECN, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1885 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103.

James, Edward T., and Janet Wilson James, eds. *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.

Kumagai, Gloria, et al. *America's Women of Color: Integrating Cultural Diversity into Non-Sex-Biased Curricula*, 1982. Available from Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, Massachusetts 02160. Bibliographies and research abstracts about women of color—Asian American, Black American, Hispanic, and American Indian.

Roberts, J. R. *Black Lesbians: An Annotated Bibliography*. Available from J. R. Roberts, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

Rural Women and Education: An Annotated Bibliography. Available from WEECN, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1885 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103.

Williams, Ora. *American Black Women in the Arts and Social Sciences: A Bibliographic Survey*. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978.

ORAL HISTORY

Although oral tradition dates back to the storytelling of ancient times, and although some stories (Afro-American narratives) were recorded by the innovative oral interview technique early in this century, it was not until the mid-1960's that oral history became *popularly* known and used. Consequently, the field of oral history is still a young one. So much more can be explored about how to gather oral histories, how to conduct oral interviews, with whom, and for what purpose.

There is a wide variety of approaches for gathering oral histories, and lots of room for creativity. Approaches can range from more formal tape-recorded interviews, to high school students conducting note-taking interviews with older people, to groups meeting together to share stories about their lives. The purpose of the group approach may simply be to reclaim and validate the significance of each individual's life history.

In any of these situations, concerns about the method of gathering histories/conducting interviews remain the same. While the use of a tape recorder has almost become requisite for doing interviews, this tool is not a *must*. Many people do not own one and cannot afford to purchase one. Inaccessibility to a technological tool should not prevent anyone from gathering information. Note taking may not capture every uttered word and sound, but is another valuable tool.

Preparation is necessary for conducting an individual interview or facilitating a group meeting. You should determine the purpose, focus on a time period, theme, or topic, and develop relevant questions to spark dialogue. The questions should not be so narrow that they inhibit or cramp the interviewee's storytelling, but should be specific enough so that they keep the interview focused. Sensitivity to the person(s) and situation(s) should be exercised before, during, and after the interview process; establishing trust is crucial.

The following resources are subdivided into five categories to enable practical use of this section. They include: Background/Guide Materials; Articles; Books about and Based on the Oral History Method; Bibliographies; and A Few Novels that Use the Oral History Method.

Background/Guide Materials

Baum, Willa. *Oral History for the Local Historical Society.* Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1974.

Feichtinger, Kristine. "You Never Hear about Any Struggles." In *Oral History in the Classroom: A Guidebook.* Chicago: Illinois Labor Society, 1976.

Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies. Women's Oral History Issue. Vol. II, No. 2 (Summer 1977). Available from Women's Studies Program, Hillside Court 104, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309.

Garner, Van Hastings. *Oral History: A New Experience in Learning.* Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Publishing, 1975.

Grele, Ronald, ed. *Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss the Method, Theory and Practice of Oral History and Oral Testimony.* New York: Precedent, 1975.

Hoopes, James. *Oral History: An Introduction for Students.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

Moss, William. *Oral History Program Manual.* New York: Praeger, 1974.

Neuenschwander, John. *Oral History as a Teaching Approach.* Washington D.C.: National Education Association, 1976.

Wigginton, Eliot. *Moments: The Foxfire Experience.* Rabun Gap, Georgia: The Foxfire Fund, 1975.

Articles

Bloom, Lynn Z. "Listen! Women Speaking." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies.* Women's Oral History Issue. Vol. II, No. 2 (Summer 1977), pp.1–2. Available from Women's Studies Program, Hillside Court 104, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309.

Carpinelli, Elaine. "My Italian Grandmother, Theresa." *Neighborhood Woman,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (November/December 1977), pp. 4–5. Newspaper published by the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, 11–29 Catherine Street, Brooklyn, New York 11211.

Gluck, Sherna. "What's So Special about Women? Women's Oral History." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies.* Women's Oral History Issue. Vol. II, No. 2 (Summer 1977), pp. 3–5. Available from Women's Studies Program, Hillside Court 104, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309.

Haley, Alex. "My Furthest Back Person—The African." In *Underfoot.* Edited by David Weitzmann. New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1976.

McCain, Nina. "Family Histories Are Her Passion: Tamara Hareven Bridges the Gap between Sociology and History as Very Few Do." *Boston Sunday Globe,* April 15, 1979.

Roddy, Joseph. "Oral History: Soundings from the Sony Age." *Rockefeller Foundation Illustrated,* Vol. 3 (May 1977), pp. 9–11.

Stewart, John. "Oral History Is Beyond the Stage of Talking." *New York Times,* May 22, 1977.

Books about and Based on the Oral History Method

Barnett, Don, and Rick Sterling, eds. *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel.* Richmond, British Columbia: LSM Press, 1975.

Davis, Margaret, ed. *Life as We Have Known It, by Co-operative Women.* New York: Norton, 1975.

Escott, Paul D. *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978.

Gamio, Manual. *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant.* New York: Dover, Inc., 1971.

Gluck, Sherna, ed. *From Parlor to Prison: Five American Suffragists Talk about Their Lives.* New York: Vintage Books, 1976.

Grandmothers, Mothers, Daughters: Oral History—Three Generations. Institute on Pluralism, 165 East 56th Street, New York, New York 10022.

Kahn, Kathy, ed. *Hillbilly Women.* New York: Avon, 1974.

Katz, Jane, ed. *I Am the Fire of Time: The Voices of Native American Women.* New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977.

Linderman, Frank. *Pretty-Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972.

Lurie, Nancy, ed. *Mountain Wolf-Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961.

Lynd, Alice, and Staughton Lynd. *Rank and File: Personal Histories of Working-Class Organizers.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Mander, Anica Vesel, with Sarika Finci Hofbauer. *Blood Ties: A Woman's History.* New York: Random House, Inc., 1976.

Seifer, Nancy. *Nobody Speaks for Me! Self-Portraits of American Working-Class Women.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.

Shackelford, Laurel, and Bill Weinberg, eds. *Our Appalachia.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Southern Exposure. No More Moanin', Voices of Southern Struggle, Vol. 1, No. 3/4 (Winter 1974). Available from P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

____________, Special Issue: *Generations. Women in the South,* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter 1977). Available from P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

Terkel, Studs. *Hard Times.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1970.

____________. *Working.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.

These Are Our Lives. As told by the people and written by the members of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. New York: Norton and Co., 1939.

Thompson, Paul. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Walker, Margaret. *How I Wrote* Jubilee. Chicago: Third World Press, 1972.

Wigginton, Eliot, ed. *Foxfire.* Seven volumes. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday. Vol. I., 1972; Vol. II, 1973; Vol. III, 1975; Vol. IV, 1977; Vol. V, 1979; Vol. VI, 1980; Vol. VII, 1982.

Wilson, Gilbert L. "Waheenee: An Indian Girl's Story Told by Herself." *North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains,* Vol. 38, Nos. 1 and 2 (Winter/Spring 1971).

Bibliographies

Baum, Willa. "Oral History." *Histroy News,* Vol. 31, No. 6 (June 1976).

Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies. Women's Oral History Issue, Vol. II (Summer 1977). Available from Women's Studies Program, Hillside Court 104, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309.

Meckler, Alan, and Ruth McMullin (compilers). *Oral History Collections.* New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1975.

Southern Exposure. No More Moanin', Voices of Southern Struggle, Vol. 1, No. 3/4 (Winter 1974). Available from P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

Waserman, Manfred (compiler). *Bibliography on Oral History.* Revised Edition. New York: Oral History Association, 1975.

A Few Novels that Use the Oral History Method

Cornelisen, Ann. *Women of the Shadows.* Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976.

Haley, Alex. *Roots.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1976.

Walker, Margaret. *Jubilee.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966.

FILMS AND SLIDE SHOWS

And Ain't I A Woman? A History of Women in the United States from 1600 to the Present. Slide show, 15 minutes, narrative script and teacher's guide included. Produced by Deirdre Delaney, Mary Fastaband, and Leona Pollack. Available for rental or purchase from the producers at P.O. Box 730, Boston, Massachusetts 02102.

New Day Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey 07417. Write for catalog. The following films on women in history are available for rental or purchase:

The Other Half of the Sky: A China Memoir. 16 mm, color, 74 minutes. Directed by Claudia Weill and Shirley MacLaine; produced by Shirley MacLaine.

Great Grandmother: A History and Celebration of Prairie Women. 16 mm, color, 29 minutes. By Anne Wheeler and Lorna Rasmussen.

Union Maids: A Documentary about Women Organizing in the 1930's. 16 mm, black-and-white, 48 minutes. Produced by Julia Reichert, James Kl[illegible], and Miles Mogulescu. A documentary about three women union organizers during the 1930's.

With Babies and Banners. 16 mm, color, 45 minutes. Directed by Lorraine Gray; produced by Anne Bohlen, Lyn Goldfarb, and Lorraine Gray. Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade.

Yudie. 16 mm, black-and-white, 20 minutes. A film about independence, aging, and the immigrant experience.

Star Film Library. An excellent catalog. For a listing of their film holdings, and other distributors, film libraries, slide shows and videotapes, write to 25 West Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02111.

We Will Not Be Beaten. Black-and-White, 35 minutes, 1979. Available from Transition House Films, 120 Boylston Street, Room 708, Boston, Massachusetts 02116. A documentary film about battered women.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAYS

Baxter, Annette K., with Constance Jacobs. *To Be a Woman in America: 1850–1930.* New York: Times Books, 1978.

Carawan, Guy and Candie (recorders), and Robert Yellin (photographer). *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life: The Peoples of Johns Island, South Carolina—Their Faces, Their Words and Their Songs.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966.

Harley, F. Jack. *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties.* New York: DaCap Press, Inc., 1977.

Jensen, Oliver. *The Revolt of American Women.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971.

San Francisco Women's History Group. *What Have Women Done? A Photo Essay on Working Women in the United States.* San Francisco: United Front Press, 1976.

Ullman, Doris. *The Appalachian Photographs of Doris Ullman.* Penland, North Carolina: The Jargon Society, 1971.

____________. *The Darkness and the Light.* Available from Aperture, Inc., Elm Street, Millerton, New York 12546. 1974.

MUSIC: BOOKS AND RECORDS

Alloy, Evelyn. *Working Women's Music: The Songs and Struggles of Women in the Cotton Mills, Textile Plants and Needle Trades.* Available from New England Free Press, 60 Union Square, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143. 1976.

Carawan, Guy and Candie (recorders), and Robert Yellin (photographer). *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life: The People of Johns Island, South Carolina—Their Faces, Their Words and Their Songs.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966.

Dowda, Rus. "He Took Her by Her Golden Curls and Throwed Her Round and Round: Appalachian Women in the Nineteenth Century and Their Images in the Murder Ballads of the Time." Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 1978.

Russell, Michele. "Slave Codes and Liner Notes." *The Radical Teacher,* No. 4 (March 1977).

Sing Out! Songs of American Women, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1976). Women's voices: Bernice Reagon, Alice Gerrard, Suni Paz, Deborah Silverstein, Lily May Ledford, Ethel Raim. *Songs of Black Women:* Sarah Ogan Gunning ("Her Story," "Women and the Dulcimer").

Stanley, Len. "Hazel and Alice: Custom Made Women Blues." *Southern Exposure*, Special Issue: *Generations*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter 1977).

. . . *And Ain't I A Woman?* New Harmony Sisterhood Band. Brooklyn, New York: Paredon Records, 1977.

. . . *But the Women Rose*. Vols. 1 and 2. New York: Folkway Records (FD5535), 1971.

Give Your Hands to Struggle. Bernice Reagon. Brooklyn, New York: Paredon Records, 1975.

Side by Side. Re-Enactments of Scenes from Women's History, 1848–1920. Woburn, Massachusetts: Galaxia Enterprises, 1978.

So Glad I'm Here. Bessie Jones. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Rounder Records, 1974.

Songs of the Suffragettes. New York: Folkway Records (FH5281), 1958.

Step It Down. Bessie Jones. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Rounder Records,

POETRY

Bulkin, Elly. "Kissing/Against the Light: A Look at Lesbian Poetry." *The Radical Teacher* (December 1978).

Grahn, Judy. *Edward the Dyke, and Other Poems*. Oakland, California: The Women's Press Collective, 1971. Available from the Women's Press Collective, 5251 Broadway, Oakland, California 94618. Includes the poems "A History of Lesbianism" and "The Common Woman."

Hoffman, Nancy, and Florence Howe, eds. *Women Working: Stories and Poems*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1977.

Larcom, Lucy. *An Idyl of Work*. Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1975 (1876). About factory mill life; she herself was a mill worker in the mid-1800's.

Lorde, Audre. *The Black Unicorn*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1978. She also has published many other poetry books. .

Parker, Pat. "Movement in Black." In *Movement in Black*. Oakland, California: Diana Press, 1978. A poem concerning the history of Black women.

Renfro, G. Herbert. *Life and Works of Phillis Wheatley*. Miami: Mnemosgne Publishers, 1969 (1916). Phillis Wheatley was a Black poet in the 1700's in the United States.

Rosetti, William Michael. *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rosetti*. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1904.

Shange, Ntozake. For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf: A Choreopoem. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977.

ART

Painting, Sculpture, Drawing

Fine, Elas Honig. *The Afro-American Artist*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

Harris, Ann Sutherland, and Linda Nochlin. *Women Artists, 1550–1950.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.

"Leonora Carrington's Visionary Art for the New Age." *Chrysalis,* No. 3 (1977).

"Lesbian Art and Artists." *Heresies,* No. 3 (Fall 1977), p. 1. Miss Willson and Miss Brundidge.

Lippard, Lucy. *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art.* New York: Dutton, 1977.

____________. "Surprises: Some Women Artists' Books." See also Judith Hoffberg, "Bibliography of Women Artists' Books." *Chrysalis,* No. 5 (1977).

Peterson, Karen, and J. J. Wilson. *Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century.* New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

Winter, Nina, ed. *Interview with the Muse: Remarkable Women Speak on Creativity and Power.* Berkeley, California: Moon Books, 1978.

Quilting, Basketmaking, Needlework (general)

Dewhurst, C. K; Betty McDowell, and Marsha MacDonald. *Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women.* New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979.

Eaton, Allen H. *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands.* New York: Dover, 1973 (1937).

Elsie, Allen. *Pomo Basketmaking.* Healdsburg, California: Naturegraph Publishers, 1972.

Little, Nina Fletcher. *Country Arts in Early American Homes.* New York: Dutton, 1975.

Vlach, John Michael. *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts.* Cleveland: Department of Art History and Education of the Cleveland Museum of Art, 1977.

Quilting

Chase, Pattie, with Mimi Dolbier. *The Contemporary Quilt.* New York: Dutton, 1979.

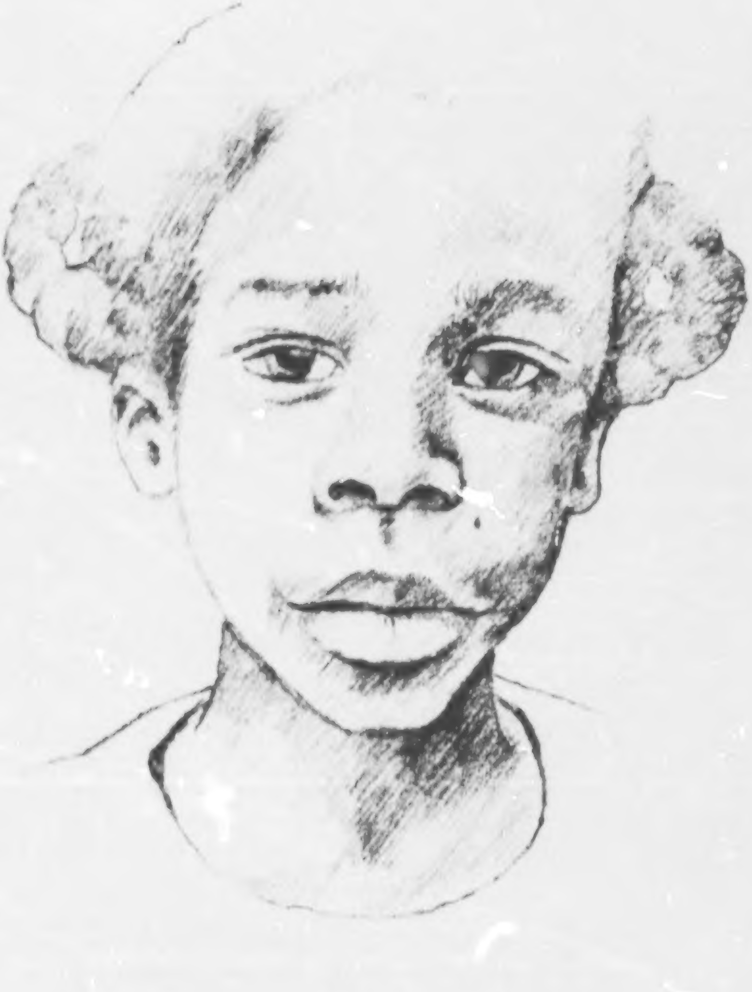
Cooper, Patricia, and Norma Bradley. *The Quilters: Women and Domestic Art.* New York: Doubleday, 1977.

Hedges, Elaine. "Quilts and Women's Culture." *The Radical Teacher,* No. 4 (March 1977).

Ickis, Marguerite. *The Standard Book of Quiltmaking and Collecting.* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1949. Includes 482 illustrations.

Mainardi, Patricia. "Quilts: The Great American Art." *Radical America,* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1973). Republished as a pamphlet in 1978 by the author; expanded and revised.

Miller, Jennifer, "Quilting Women: Rather Quilt than Eat, Almost." *Southern Exposure,* Special Issue: *Generations. Women in the South,* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter 1977).


Rachel Burger

7. WOMEN AND HEALTH CARE: ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVES

Madge Kaplan

INTRODUCTION

As I compiled resources for the women and health curriculum, I was struck by the amount of literature that perceptively and sensitively discussed the relationship of women to health care in the United States. Why has so much attention been focused on health care? Certainly, health care is a necessity for all people; yet that necessity has been denied each day in the practices of health care delivery in the United States. The work of transforming the knowledge and practice of health care to better serve the needs of all people has, to a great extent, been generated by those outside established medical institutions. The particular ways in which medicine fails people have been articulated by various social movements.

Social movements like the civil rights and women's liberation movements have told us much about the character of medicine today, especially the racial and sexual dimensions of both medical research and practices. The civil rights movement highlighted the fact that Black people and other people of color were denied access to hospitals and specialists. These people made the connection between the abject conditions of their communities and the inadequate medical attention they received. In fact they asserted that the deteriorating health of so many Third World people was an effect of the conditions in which they lived, conditions that denied them both civil rights and the general possibility of changing the enforced poverty, including poor nutrition.

The women's liberation movement, in trying to account for the oppression of women, looked at the basic institutions affecting women's lives. Movement activists found that medicine and the modern medical industry played a significant role in shaping the inferior status of women.*

Madge Kaplan *has been active in the women's movement for several years. She has both taught and developed curricula for high school students and community women, combining her interests in women's health and women's history. She is currently active in the struggle to retain abortion rights, is coauthor of the pamphlet* More than a Choice: Women talk about Abortion, *and is a contributor to an educational slide show in English and Spanish on sterilization abuse.*

---

*By medical industry, I mean medicine as business, including drug manufacturing, the development of medical technology, a system of training doctors, and a defined set of work relations within health care institutions.

The perception from the civil rights movement that health and sickness are social products—that is, the products of conditions in which we live—has aided women in explaining why women are so dependent on doctors (especially in light of the studies that show women are not taken seriously by doctors). In the nineteenth century, medical views defined woman as inherently sick: her complaints were simply traced to her uterus or ovaries; her energies were to concentrate on those organs lest they dry up; and her functions as wife and mother were seen as the sum of woman's place in society. Today, although women may no longer be classified as inherently physically sick, the change has not been from "sick" to "well." Rather, it has "shifted from 'physically sick' to 'mentally ill.'"[1] From menstruation to pregnancy, from birth control to abortion, women are constantly reminded of their ignorance and powerlessness in relation to their bodies. When issues such as pregnancy become the domain of doctors and the medical industry—that is, when these people control the technology, distribution, and laws regulating birth control and abortion—women become vulnerable to abuse, guinea pigs for experimentation, and generally exempt from having any power to make decisions affecting their bodies. This is not the "natural" situation for women; it is a historical development. As Ehrenreich and English state in *Complaints and Disorders:*

> For a host of reasons connected with reproductivity women continue to visit doctors and enter hospitals far more frequently than men do. Pregnancy, if no longer described explicitly as a disease, is still treated like a medical problem, in exactly the same setting and by exactly the same personnel used for a treatment of actual disorders. Childbirth is no longer a cause for lengthy confinement, but it is, more so than ever, an alienating surgical event. Menopause, while no longer an indication for terminal bed rest, is still described to medical students as "the most serious endocrinological disorder next to diabetes," "curable" of course, with expensive estrogen therapy.[2]

Medicine and healing were once the domain of women—health information made known through community networks and passed on from generation to generation. Women created birth control technology, did abortions for one another, and developed remedies for all kinds of ailments. Conversely, the medical industry rests on the exclusion of women from precisely the kinds of health information women once offered to one another. Today, because of the women's movement, there has been a rediscovery of this history. Women's historical practices are once again supporting women in generating new technology, in operating woman-run health clinics, and in organizing communication networks for passing on new information to other women.

The frequency with which women's health concerns have been ignored, trivialized, or "efficiently" remedied by surgery or some new pill on the market is now cause for great concern and has been well documented.[3] Increasingly, however, more and more women are demanding access to information concerning their health, seeking clear explanations of procedures they are asked to undergo, and refusing to accept the inadequate services that so frequently pass as health care delivery.

---

[1] Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1973) p. 79.

[2] Ibid., pp. 75–76.

[3] For some general resources on these issues, see: Gena Corea, *The Hidden Malpractice: How American Medicine Mistreats Women* (New York: Jove Publications, 1978); and Claudia Dreifus, ed., *Seizing Our Bodies: The Politics of Women's Health* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

Benefiting from campaigns led by Black, Latin, and Native American women, more women have become aware of the way hospitals use them as "teaching material" for the training of residents (e.g., sterilization abuse).[1]

Learning new information about our bodies, discussing how our bodies work, understanding why certain methods of birth control may be damaging to our health, and visiting a woman-run health clinic can all be important new experiences for us as women and can be tools for gaining some measure of control over our lives.

It is within this larger framework that "Women and Health Care: Issues and Alternatives" was developed and taught. Each session in the course guide offers women valuable information about their health and promotes discussions of how women can better assert their needs, individually and collectively. Each session is part of a process of reconnecting women to knowledge and skills that were once a familiar part of women's culture and folklore.

GOALS

"Women and Health Care: Issues and Alternatives" is a twelve-week workshop series designed for adolescent and adult women in a nontraditional educational setting. The setting could be a community center, a drug or alcohol treatment program, an alternative school, an adult education program, a prison, or a similar place. Each session offers ways to make sense of concrete information (e.g., women's anatomy) and the nature of health care in American society as shaped by structures of race, sex, and class.

It is primary to the goals of the course that we women need time and space with other women to figure out common issues and concerns and to develop more positive images of ourselves and our capabilities. Obviously, no twelve-week workshop can effectively present these issues in great depth. What the workshop series can do, though, is lay the groundwork for future discussions and begin to expose women to the information, skills, and resources that are available. As one woman described her experience, "I feel like I'm going to school for free—a school where I'm learning things I *want* to learn."

The following are the overall goals of "Women and Health Care: Issues and Alternatives":

- To provide space for women to determine the health issues that are of concern to them
- To work toward ending the isolation that often exists between women, especially as it concerns the very individual and separate way in which most women seek and receive health care
- To demystify medicine. To break down the notion that only a doctor is capable of understanding medical knowledge. To translate medical language into lay language and to encourage women to feel entitled to the same "translation" in conventional health care facilities
- To acquaint women—through discussion, written materials, and audiovisual aids—with much-needed information about how their bodies work; about pregnancy, childbirth, birth control, nutrition, etc.

---

[1] See Claudia Dreifus, "Sterilizing the Poor," in *Seizing Our Bodies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

- To provide resources and skill sharing for finding specific information when needed
- To examine ways of coping with and challenging the intimidation and vulnerability most women—of all ages—experience in many health and medical care settings
- To acquaint women with existing health services and resources, including alternative health facilities, and to share the experiences of activist organizations that educate and organize around specific issues, such as reproductive freedom, occupational health and safety, sexual harassment, and violence against women
- To build more awareness of the importance of preventive health care and the value of self-help, especially in the areas of gynecology and nutrition, but applicable as well to other areas of women's lives
- To acquaint women with the role nutrition plays in relation to health and illness
- To acquaint women with the role advertising plays in preparing women to conform to the selling needs of large industries

It is important to note that the goals of the workshop series are broad and far reaching. However, as illustrated in individual session descriptions, very specific and manageable goals are needed for any given session.

ORGANIZING THE GROUPS

The course guide was developed from the experience of working with two different groups of women: white working-class mothers in an alcoholism treatment program (Workshop A) and primarily Third World, adolescent women in a GED (high school equivalency) program (Workshop B). Although each group had very different sets of concerns, both had a tremendous curiosity for clear, factual knowledge of thier bodies, and both needed space for sharing and analyzing their experiences in seeking health care services. As one participant said, "'Now I know that a woman can examine you rather than a man in a gynecological exam and I know how they do abortions."

Workshop A

"Women and Health Care: Issues and Alternatives" was taught in a new day-treatment program for alcoholic women and their children. It is one of several services offered to women who are recovering alcoholics, as part of a larger and innovative alcoholism treatment and education program. Day treatment includes intensive individual and group counseling, discussion groups on women's issues, education about alcohol and drug abuse, exercise, and day care and counseling for children of alcoholic mothers. The program serves women from primarily two neighboring communities.

"Women and Health Care" was integrated into the treatment program on a weekly basis for 1½-hour sessions. The workshop series was given over a three-month period. Seven women participated in some or all of the sessions. There was quite an age range; women were in their early twenties to their mid-fifties. At the time of the workshops, there were one Black woman and several white women in the group. All participants came from low-income backgrounds, and most were single heads of households. At least one of the women was a lesbian mother.

The day-treatment program offered an important environment for a workshop on health issues. There is a great deal of need among women recovering from alcoholism to have health information and discussion. Getting the women in touch with how their bodies are feeling and with general health needs is part of the treatment process. The workshops contributed to an overall goal of the program: helping women to take better care of themselves and their children and to gain some confidence in dealing with the health care system and society as a whole. This particular workshop series emphasized food and nutrition, awareness of women's own bodies, self-help, and mental health issues. Not surprisingly, mental health issues, such as poor treatment in mental hospitals, the threat of institutionalization, and overmedication, were crucial to these women. All were faced with the struggle to overcome a dependence upon alcohol, the stigma of society's view of the alcoholic (which is harsher for women), and the effects of traditional treatment for anyone labeled "in trouble," "out of control," or "crazy." The program staff share a perspective that includes building a supportive, alternative-treatment environment for women—an environment that can be therapeutic by empowering women to take more control over their lives and their sobriety.

Workshop B

The course was taught in a new alternative school for young women in a major urban area. The school offers GED (high school diploma equivalency) preparation, in conjunction with work experience based on a paid-job program. In addition to basic reading, writing, and math skills, the school emphasizes the importance of developing survival skills among the women and an awareness of ways they can act on the conflicts and decisions they confront in their daily lives. Ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-one, most of the women were Black or Latin and had been in public schools for the greater part of their education. At the time this workshop was taught, three women in the school were mothers of small children; at least three more women were pregnant and expected to give birth over the next several months.

The health workshop took place once a week for about an hour. An average of ten women participated from an enrollment of twenty-five women in the school. Attendance varied greatly from week to week, partially because of the school's newness and the continual new-student enrollments each week.

At least one and often two staff members were present at all workshop sessions. This was especially important in the beginning when the facilitator was establishing her role. During both health series the facilitator checked in with the site staff at least once between sessions to follow up on the previous workshop session. The site staff's ongoing relationship with the women and sensitivity to the impact of certain topics were crucial to the success of the sessions. The facilitator raised such concerns as: "Were there any comments made after a session?" "Was anyone disturbed by a discussion?" This gave site staff an opportunity to shape what was happening at the site, to identify women who were perhaps experiencing difficulties, and to help recommend and shape an emphasis for the next session. These workshop series have been highly effective in helping community-based staff become involved in the steps in organizing a course on health, and in being committed to facilitating their own workshop series for women involved in their programs in the future.

THE GROUP PROCESS

There are numerous issues to be aware of in facilitating group discussions in a health workshop like this. I would like to highlight sexuality, homosexuality, race, and culture as issues central to the goals of the course as presented here and as examples of the kind of sensitivity and consciousness needed to run a workshop for women from diverse backgrounds.

Sexuality Issues: Homosexuality

The emphasis in this particular course guide is on health information and taking better care of ourselves. Neither workshop series presented here adequately addresses issues of sexuality.* Some listings in the Resources section take up particular approaches for discussing sexuality with teenagers.

Whatever emphasis you give your workshop series, do not ignore questions about sexual identity in general and homosexuality in particular. A certain percentage of the population is gay and you should assume you will have lesbians in your sessions. To avoid homosexual issues is to make someone's life experience invisible. One way to ensure a space for lesbians is to invite a guest from a gay speakers' bureau, a lesbian organization, or a women's organization that has addressed the issue. Invite someone who feels comfortable dealing with the confusion and prejudice likely to be evident—someone who is sensitive to the fact that many homosexual people do not want their identity known.

You should also be prepared to deal in a variety of contexts with the issue of homosexuality as it arises. For example, at the alternative school, in discussing violence against Third World women, there was reaction to the idea that lesbian women, along with single women, widowed women, and divorced women, cannot rely on men for protection. At least one participant at the school took exception to the reference to lesbian women and suggested that "a man wouldn't want to rape a lesbian anyway. He'd be wasting his time!" An attempt was made to discuss with the group whether or not they thought a man could *tell* if a woman was a lesbian (indeed, could participants tell?)—whether, if his motive was rape and not a mutually consenting sexual relationship, it mattered to him in the slightest.

Issues like these are fundamental to a discussion of violence against women and to dealing with homophobia. It is important for you not only to respond to these kinds of problematic comments, but also to try to encourage other participants to share their own views. Most likely, there will not be unanimous support for one woman's view, and it is educational for the group to realize this.

Race and Culture

There is obvious value in having a Third World woman lead a workshop predominantly of Black and Latin women. Issues of identity, culture, and the struggles a woman faces every day because she is *not* white and *not* male, are just a few of the bonds that many women of color share and that often provide a common basis from which to act politically. As a facilitator who is white, I had to determine ways to connect participants to relevant resources and to other Third World women active in the area of women's health care. If you are involved in a similar situation, I would encourage your bringing other women of color into your workshops to co-facilitate different discussions and to act in the capacity of guest speakers. For example, in our field trip to a women's health clinic, a Latin woman employed at the clinic played a valuable role. Similarly, a Black woman active in the area of occupational health and safety came to visit the group, along with two other white women. This allowed participants another level of connection to the discussions, which might not have been evident if the same discussion were conducted by only white women.

---

*See Conclusion.

It is crucial in a health workshop series to recognize that Black women have special health concerns that might be important to discuss (e.g., hypertension and sickle-cell anemia).[1] Likewise, it is important to be conscious of the particular ways in which the health care system is racist, sexist, and classist. Doctors often single out women of color in promoting sterilization, for example, over other methods of birth control. Indeed, many Puerto Rican, Native American, Black, and poor white women in the United States have been sterilized either unknowingly or against their will. In a similar manner, doctors often encourage Third World patients to use birth control pills or the IUD over other methods of birth control, often despite contraindications found in a woman's medical history.

These are issues white women need to be aware of or to better understand. Issues relevant to the lives of women of color should not be confined to discussions only among women of color. They are fundamental issues to raise in any workshop series on women's health.[2]

LEADING THE GROUPS

For a workshop series that has fluctuating attendance, create a flexible structure which encourages the participation of both new and returning members. Although problems with group continuity may exist, the workshop series must be accessible, open, and sensitive to the many demands on women's lives.

An hour is a short period of time in which to share information and still allow adequate time for discussion; however, it does not exceed the attention span of most younger women. If you as the leader set realistic goals for a particular session, the hour can be very productive. Given such time limitations, it could be valuable for you to be accessible before and/or after sessions for interaction with participants on a one-to-one basis. Although some women may be reluctant to raise their concerns in front of the group, their issues are so often those of the entire group that the individual contact can help define a direction for the workshop series.

It is crucial for you as the facilitator to be flexible with the goals, nature, and content of each session. *Any* subject might spark some pressing issue for someone—an issue that might not appear related, but often, as it turns out, is interesting and useful for everyone to hear about and may be very important to one particular woman.

Throughout the workshop series, participants should also have time to determine which emphasis makes most sense to them. For example, the workshop series for adolescent women emphasized gynecological health issues and sexuality because both issues are often the basis for much of a young woman's contact with the health care system. An infection and/or the need for birth control might be the impetus for a young woman's first experiences with a gynecologist, a hospital, or a neighborhood clinic.

Approaches to sharing information and initiating discussions will vary with the subject matter, interests of the women, and particular circumstances of the day. It is helpful to have a few alternative plans at hand, because one approach may elicit little response while another arouses everyone's interest. Different ways of presenting factual material at these sites included films, other audiovisual media, discussions, reading, questionnaires, field trips, and guest speakers/facilitators. The intent in using a variety of approaches is to present issues and information that help women view their own experience, with the core of each session still being discussion and sharing.

---

[1] See Angela Wilson, "Black Women's Health," *HealthRight*, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 1.

[2] See the health curriculum for Latin women in Chapter 8 of this course guide.

Usually, at the alternative school, the mere announcement that the health workshop was beginning started a flood of questions from several women at once: "Hey, how come I got this itch?" "Can you get pregnant if you have your period when you do it?" "Why does the pill make you feel sick?" Too often answers were attempted amidst simultaneous, competing conversations and questions. Although the many questions and the high level of enthusiasm were very positive signs, it is more helpful to the participants if you organize the questions and answers. One approach I suggest is to leave a certain amount of time at the beginning or end of each session for questions and answers (you might give this time a creative name) so that everyone is assured of time for her questions and concerns. Another suggestion is to have everyone write a question on a card, and then discuss the questions over a period of weeks. This method ensures that individual needs are met, while it encourages the group to consider questions instead of viewing you as the sole source of information. Furthermore, the act of writing a concern elicits participation from women who might be uncomfortable speaking aloud. The intent is not to eliminate spontaneity in the sessions, but to ensure that information is shared and everyone is included.

Group discussion of a film or reading can be very useful. However, it can also become the exclusive province of those women who feel most comfortable talking about either the material or their own lives. Try to involve everyone, with one another and with the subject, in ways that do not rely entirely on speaking. Reading or having another participant read a group member's poem or thoughts can be helpful and supportive. Having women work in small groups either to develop or to enact a role-play situation also encourages everyone's participation and often leads to new insights when the exercise is re-created for the group as a whole.

One caution about the use of film: although films are a wonderful vehicle for stimulating discussion (and at these sites proved largely successful), often they are not the best approach for involving everyone with the topic and the group. Even the best of films can induce passivity among participants, especially younger women. Be sure to choose films which leave ample time for discussion.

Field trips and guest speakers were an integral part of both workshop series. Guest speakers provided a welcome change of pace and focused attention on another person(s) besides me. Having women from other health groups share skills and information also helped expose women to the resources in their own or a nearby community. Field trips can be positive for these same reasons. Visiting a woman-owned and -operated health facility allowed the younger women to experience a very different health care setting.

Readings for sessions at both sites were short and simple. Because reading levels vary, it is usually more effective to read aloud within the workshop setting. This supports women working on reading skills in general and may encourage some women to read more on their own. It may be unrealistic to assign readings for between-class sessions, because reading a story is something many mothers rarely have the luxury or the time for in their day-to-day lives. In addition to reading, role plays, small-group discussions, and various games are all valuable approaches to try.

Using a variety of resources and approaches helps women rely less on you, the facilitator, as a source of knowledge and confirmation, and more on one another. This can be difficult to achieve in an introductory workshop, but women need to see that they can offer one another support and that you do not duplicate (however unintentionally) the role of another expert.

CONTENT

The following is an outline of discussions and resources for this workshop series on women's health. The section is divided into two parts to highlight the two teaching experiences—adolescent and adult—from which the workshop series evolved. You will find that often the resources and content relate generally to any age group. The second section, for adolescents (Workshop B), occasionally directs the facilitator to look at the activities and discussions developed with adult women (Workshop A). Although sessions are roughly designed for 1½ hours, certain discussions and issues may necessitate more than one session. Be flexible, and do not be too ambitious in your expectations for any one session.

In reviewing these materials, do not feel confined to the topics mentioned here. There are numerous health issues that are not specifically developed here, but that could be addressed in future workshop series—the subjects of menopause, herbal medicine, alternatives to Western methods of healing, lesbian health concerns, women as health care workers, and sexuality. The feminist process on which the materials are based, that is, valuing women's own knowledge and everyday experiences, is intended to apply to any topic a group might choose to emphasize.

Resources listed under each session are explained in greater detail in the Resources section at the end of this chapter.

Workshop A: Alternative Alcoholism-Treatment Program

Session One: Introduction to "Women and Health Care: Issues and Alternatives"

A. *Goals*

1. To introduce women to the workshop series
2. To find out what issues and concerns women have
3. To introduce women to an important resource, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*
4. To explore together what affects our daily health

B. *Suggested Activity*

1. Have everyone fill out the "How I Rate My Health" questionnaire, below. Take turns going around the room and sharing with the group what is been written.

HOW I RATE MY HEALTH

1. Today I feel I am in ____________ health (circle at least one):

   Good   So-so   Poor   Terrific

   If you can, explain why: ______________________________

2. Finish these sentences in whatever way you want to:

   When I feel good, it is usually because ______________________

   ____

   ____

   When I feel lousy or not so good, it is usually because ______________

   ____

   ____

3. Fill in the blank, and list as many things as you can think of (think about what you or your children need every day):

   I think a person needs ____________ to stay well and healthy.

   ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________

   ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________

   ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________

4. Check all the things you feel are true for you:
When I do not feel well, in either my body or my mind, I usually:
_____ deal with it myself
_____ tell a friend or friends
_____ seek support from a lover, boyfriend, or husband
_____ seek support from a relative
_____ call my doctor
_____ ____________________
_____ go to a nearby clinic or hospital
_____ take aspirin
_____ go to sleep
_____ take something else
_____ ____________________
_____ ____________________

5. I probably see a doctor (check one): once __________ twice __________ three times __________ four times or more __________ during the year. Fill in the blank: My children/child see/sees a doctor or a clinic at least __________ times a year.

6. The things I most love to eat are (list as many things as you can think of): _
____
____
____

7. The health issues that most interest me are: ____________________
____
____

8. The part/parts of my body that I like the best is/are: ____________________
____

This questionnaire is a non-threatening exercise that helps loosen everyone up and allows women to participate on the level they feel comfortable with. Question 4, for example, tries to get at issues of whom we trust. The point is that *healing* involves more than taking aspirin for a headache or having a doctor write out a prescription. Healing should also include care, personal attention, and nurturance from other people. Question 5 can raise issues of how often or under what circumstances we relate to doctors. Often women stay away from doctors, hospitals, and clinics for understandable reasons. Try to discover what these reasons are. What kinds of experiences do women have when they do seek health care?

Once the questionnaire is completed, give every woman her own copy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*[1] by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. Take time to go through the different sections of the book. Emphasize that participants can read short excerpts or just look up a particular topic.

The general widespread use of *OBOS* by women of diverse class, racial and ethnic backgrounds, does indicate that the experience of being a woman in today's society and in dealing with the health care system is a shared reality. However, differences among women in age, sexual identity, class, race, and culture demand more serious attention than the book provides and affect the meaning a health issue will have on any one individual woman's life. Differences among women also often lead to very different treatment by health professions. In using *OBOS* it is very important to consider that women in your workshop series will probably have experiences and perceptions to add to those raised in the book. Hopefully, future resources on women's health can better document and discuss differences among women and how those shape each of our relationships with the health care system. Supplement *OBOS* with other fact sheets and materials that are easier to read and more specifically geared to adolescent women. The feminist perspective of *OBOS* is largely absent from most current health materials for teenagers, so it remains an important framework for the facilitator.

---

[1] *Our Bodies, Ourselves* will be denoted from here on as *OBOS*. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women*, Second Edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

C. *Resources*[1]

Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women.

Session Two: Food and Nutrition I

A. *Goals*

1. To document and discuss what we eat in the course of a day
2. To determine what we want to change about our eating habits
3. To discuss the things that influence what we eat and what we buy
4. To emphasize the relationship between nutrition and physical exercise

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Have everyone (including the leader) record what she has eaten, the approximate time of day, and the quantity of food consumed over at least twenty-four hours, preferably over two or three days. Ask everyone to share the information and briefly state her evaluation of her diet and what changes she would like to make.

   Ask everyone to think about what influences her eating and food-purchasing habits and to share this information with the group. Questions you might ask are:

- How do advertisements influence your eating? influence what your children want to eat?
- How does your economic situation affect your eating?
- What role does your cultural heritage play in what you like to eat?
- What influences what you cook? convenience? your family's desires? what you want?
- Do you and your family sit down to a meal together most nights?
- Do you eat in front of the TV?
- Do you eat alone?
- Does anyone else cook at home besides/instead of you?
- Is meal time a relaxing time for you? Is it a tense time? Why or why not?

   Too often, teaching about food and nutrition is done in a moralistic and judgmental way: "This is bad for you to eat. This is good for you to eat. Choose wisely from the four or five or six basic food groups." This teaching approach is without consideration of race, culture, class, age, or the events in our lives which influence our choices and decisions about food. It is important to begin with women evaluating for themselves the strengths and weaknesses of their diet with knowledge they already possess. It is sometimes interesting to find foods common to everyone's diet: "Is there protein in everyone's diet? What kind? Are there carbohydrates?"

2. Consider building physical exercise into your workshop series. You might want to invite someone who teaches basic fitness for women, yoga or dance, to provide the group with simple exercises, stretches and relaxation techniques.

   Dieting and exercise are essential topics for discussion. Most women either are on diets or feel they should be, and women often get too little exercise in their lives. You might want to initiate a discussion that deals with these issues in the context of our socialization as women (e.g., to be thin, to eat according to calories rather than nutrition, to be conscious always of what sort of appearance men like) and of beauty standards set by advertising and the media in general. The issue of not being able to get out for exercise is linked to how unsafe women feel in the city, and in their neighborhoods. When offering support to your group to become more active, be sensitive to these concerns and help your group make connections with community organizations involved with safety issues for women.

---

[1] For bibliographic information about resources listed in these outlines, see the Resources section (pp. 203–210).

C. *Resources*
Berkeley Women's Health Collective, *Feeding Ourselves* (pamphlet); *OBOS;* Ellis, *Nutrition for Women* (pamphlet); and Katz and Goodwin, *Food: Where Nutrition, Politics and Culture Meet.*

Session Three: Food and Nutrition II

A. *Goals*

1. To expose women to complementary proteins in the context of discussing the politics of food production and consumption in the United States
2. To acquaint women with the role of nutrition in health and illness

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Show the film *Diet for a Small Planet* (approximately one half-hour in length). Emphasize that the point of the film is to show alternatives, not to tell everyone to give up all meat and become a vegetarian.
2. Bring in a dish made from a recipe from *Diet for a Small Planet* (the book) or from another cookbook that has nutritious recipes. If there is a kitchen at the workshop facility, you might decide to cook something as a group.

You might also talk about how the combining of complementary proteins can be found in a number of foods basic to Latin and Black cultures. It is interesting to discuss the pressures various ethnic groups are under in the United States to assimilate into "American" culture and to buy processed foods, which often means giving up a more nutritious, traditional diet.

Look at food charts that show the relationship between calories and basic vitamins and minerals in commonly eaten foods. Examine calories in terms of nutritional value, not as an isolated measure. Familiarize the group with common food-label terms for artificial ingredients. You might bring in a jar of mayonnaise or a cake mix and examine the labels together. Share what you know to be potentially carcinogenic ingredients, such as food colorings or sodium nitrate.

C. *Resources*
Food charts in *OBOS;* Lappe, *Diet for a Small Planet;* Jacobson and Wilson, *Nutrition Scorecard* poster (pamphlet); the film *Diet for a Small Planet.* Other films you might show include *The Big Dinner Table* and *Eat, Drink and Be Wary.*

Session Four: Common Health Issues for Women

A. *Goals*

1. To provide a general overview of some reproductive and gynecological health concerns for women
2. To explore the connections between different women's experiences in dealing with the health care system

B. *Suggested Activity*
Show the film *Taking Our Bodies Back.* Women in the film describe their experiences with breast cancer, hysterectomy, menopause, abortion, and home birth. Black women in a neighborhood clinic talk about being hassled by doctors who assume they are prostitutes whenever the women go for gynecological care. Those who were poor or on welfare also speak about the pressure from doctors to have their tubes tied.

Because the opening scene in the film shows a self-examination, make sure that the women in your group know beforehand what is meant by self-help and self-examination.* Although this will be a foreign idea to many women, it need not cause anyone to be uncomfortable. After the film, encourage women to describe how they did or did not identify with the women's experiences. Possible discussion topics include:

- The pros and cons of women taking estrogen during menopause
- The nature of the sterilization procedure and what is meant by sterilization abuse
- The problems of unnecessary surgery, especially hysterectomy, for women
- Recent information on treatment for breast cancer
- What is meant by informed consent; why patients need to know the risks and benefits of procedures
- What the particular health problems are that Third World women face
- The question of whether women doctors are necessarily better for women than men doctors are

This last point raises interesting issues. Because having more women doctors does not automatically lead to improved health care, discussion of this topic can lead to talking about the nature of medical training in our society. It is a significant breakthrough that there are more women doctors today and that women can even trust women doctors with their health care (although it should be noted that this is still not widely accepted). But the point to raise among participants is that an increase in the number of women doctors will not in itself change the nature of medicine and the health care system in our society. Although it is potentially a step in the right direction, it will mean little unless more women begin to question the fundamentally sexist and racist nature of most forms of medical training and practice in our society.

Encourage each woman to take a friend or close relative along on her medical visits. Maybe the next time a Latin woman goes to a clinic, she will refuse to accept medical information being conveyed to her in poorly spoken Spanish.

C. *Resources*

OBOS; Taking Our Bodies Back (film).

Session Five: Birth Control and Abortion

A. *Goals*

1. To discuss birth control and abortion in the context of women's self-image and life options
2. To look at various issues that shape how women and society relate to abortion
3. To discuss the role birth control and abortion have played historically in women's attempts to control the number of children they have

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Read, individually or together as a group, the short story "The Lonesomes Ain't No Spring Picnic," from the journal *Southern Exposure*.

This is a compelling story for a group of women of any age. It is an account of the struggle between women and men in a small southern town over the respect due a young woman (Sue-Ellen) after it is discovered that her death was caused by a self-induced abortion. While the plot is developing, the author weaves together the community's dealings with sex, guilt, religion, childhood socialization, relationships between husbands and wives, and the role of women within the community and within marriage. Questions you might discuss include:

---

*See the Resources section, at the end of this chapter, for information on these concepts and practices within the women's health movement.

  - Did you identify with any of the characters in the story? Did any remind you of members of your own family?
  - Can anyone remember how or if birth control, sex, or abortion was discussed when you were growing up, by family, relatives, or friends?
  - Can you remember what birth control methods were available to your mother? your grandmother?
  - Did anyone identify with the young child in the story (the author speaks a lot through her eyes and feelings) who has a great fear that sexual pleasures recently experienced with her best friend will, according to her preacher-grandfather, lead her "straight to Hell"?

2. Read together the excerpt "One Woman's Story" from *Getting Stronger.* The excerpt is a personal account of the effect of Medicaid abortion cutoffs on the life of a white working-class woman. Her account raises some important issues for discussion:
   - Her search for quality, safe birth control
   - How birth control pills were harmful to her health and why other birth control methods failed
   - The economic strains she, her husband, and their two children were living under when she discovered that she was pregnant again
   - Her desire to finish high school and get a job
   - Her attempt to make a moral decision; define what a "moral" decision is and can be

   Most women can identify with at least some, if not all, aspects of this woman's dilemma. Her story is a good illustration of the current struggle to retain women's control over abortion and the decision of when and if to have children.
3. Read from *America's Working Women* on birth control. The excerpts are taken from letters written to Margaret Sanger, an early advocate for birth control and women's rights. The letters illustrate that women have always sought to limit the number of children they have.
4. Using *OBOS* or other available resources, examine and discuss available methods of birth control. If women are interested, you may want to discuss how and why new birth control methods get tested—and often on women in Latin American countries, frequently without their knowledge. (This is especially true of birth control pills, the IUD, and various new synthetic hormones.)
5. Have someone who does abortion and birth control counseling come in and talk to the group about her experiences. Invite someone who is involved in pro-abortion organizing from a multi-issue perspective.

C. *Resources*

OBOS; Erlien et al., *More than a Choice* (pamphlet); Red Sun Press and Preterm Writing Collective, eds., *Getting Stronger* (pamphlet); Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good;* Baxardall, Gordon, and Reverby, eds., *America's Working Women;* back issues of *HealthRight* (see the Organizations category of the Resources section); Dreifus, ed., *Seizing Our Bodies;* and Miller, "The Lonesomes Ain't No Spring Picnic."

Session Six: Taking Care of Our Bodies

A. *Goals*

1. To share information on what women should expect of a good gynecological exam
2. To review basic female reproductive and sexual anatomy

3. To discuss the role and meaning of self-help in the context of helping women be less dependent on doctors
4. To share with the group the experiences, skills, and knowledge of a woman-run feminist health center in the community

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. It is extremely worthwhile to invite a health care provider who shares a feminist perspective on women's health to visit your group and share resources and answer questions. If a demonstration of a breast and cervical self-examination is an option, be sure to discuss such plans in advance and to let the group members know it is not mandatory that they participate.
2. Talk about the differences between money-making clinics and methods of health care that place priority on women's needs. Examine together the ads in your local newspaper that describe birth control, abortion, and pregnancy services. What's being offered at what cost? Does the ad appear legitimate? What information is missing? What should you check out first before using a particular service?

C. *Resources*

OBOS; fact sheets from a local feminist health center; Cherniak and Feingold, *Birth Control Handbook* (pamphlet).

Session Seven: Mental Health

A. *Goals*

1. To look at a range of conditions and problems that all women share and which lead some women to be institutionalized
2. To look at how mental institutions reinforce the status quo and power relations in our society
3. To assert what we want as an alternative to the institutional experience

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Show the videotape *Stress or Symptoms.* This recently completed videotape consists of interviews with six low-income women, white and Third World. The women's collective experiences include alcohol abuse, domestic violence, institutionalization, and overcoming the loss of control from being placed in an unhealthy environment. Most of the women interviewed eventually find support through women's shelters, women's groups, and community treatment programs.

   Topics that might come up are:
   - Isolation—the fear of telling anyone
   - What happens when a mother finally cannot cope
   - The pressures to "keep it together"
   - Guilt
   - Asking for help
   - Getting help from other women who are in the same situation
2. Examine advertisements for medications for women; look at ads in major medical journals, professional magazines, and women's magazines. You might ask women to write down the messages that they receive from the images. What do the ads say about how the medical world views women? about the use of drugs? Ads for tranquilizers, hormone replacements, diet pills, and antidepressants portray women (and older people) as being weak, dependent, and totally at the mercy of their emotions or bodies. The solution offered to women and the aged is to be wholly dependent on drugs and doctors.
3. Spend time discussing Third World women and mental health. What problems are similar to those of white women? What problems are different? Alice Walker's collection of short stories points vividly to the connections between

powerlessness and Black women's oppression, so-called "sickness," and the mental health problems Black women face. The two stories "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" and "Her Sweet Jerome" are especially recommended.

C. *Resources*
Bloom et al., *Off the Couch* (pamphlet); Chamberlain, *On Our Own;* Walker, *In Love and Trouble;* and *Stress or Symptoms* videotape

Workshop B: Alternative School

Session One: Introduction to "Women and Health Care: Issues and Alternatives"

A. *Goals*
Please refer to Workshop A, Session One (p. 179).

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Describe the workshop series to participants. Spend time discovering participants' concerns and needs. Talk about their past experiences in a health class.
   Questions you might ask include:
   - Did anyone in school or anywhere else ever talk to you about health? about menstruation? about sex?
   - What was that like? Who ran the group? the teacher? gym teacher? nurse? counselor?
   - Did you trust that person? Why or why not? Was the group interesting? boring?
   - Did you get to talk about feelings or just facts?
   - Did your class/group include both men and women or were you separated? If you did not all meet together, did you know what the boys were learning? Was it similar to or different from what you were learning?

   Tapping earlier experiences can help participants see that you are sensitive to likes and dislikes in the group and that you do not intend to shape the workshop series according to an abstract notion of what people *should* know about their health. Most of the women at the school had some preconceived and usually negative image in their minds of a "health teacher." Among young women in particular there will be a certain amount of initial mistrust and testing.

   Give all participants a chance to assert what they already know about health, especially because some participants might be struggling with self-confidence and a belief in their ability to learn *anything*. Upon hearing a list of suggested topics for the workshop series, younger women may claim that they already know about "that stuff." While the selection of topics is indeed partly based on what women feel they know and have learned, choices may be made for other reasons: fear of something too hard to understand, or a topic that raises difficult issues for a particular person.

   Be sensitive to everyone's needs but do be assertive about those areas you feel are really basic to the workshop series. Sometimes calling a topic "A *Review* of Basic Female Anatomy" can give credit to participants who feel they have knowledge in that area. At the school, we tacked up a large sheet of paper on the wall and kept a running list of topics as they came up. Often topics were added on the days I was not there. The list kept growing in size and scope and helped participants see that their own sense of women's health issues was growing as well.

2. Have everyone fill out the "How I Rate My Health" questionnaire. Refer to Workshop A, Session One for further description.
3. Introduce participants to a women's health resource, such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves (OBOS)*, described in Workshop A, Session One.

C. *Resources*

OBOS; Gates, Klaw, and Steinberg, *Changing Learning, Changing Lives.*

Session Two: The Politics of Sexual Anatomy or, What's in a Name, Anyway?

A. *Goals*

1. To provide an introduction to discussing female reproductive and sexual anatomy by looking at common slang references (and their variations in different ethnic and Third World communities)
2. To consider how slang reflects and perpetuates negative, sexist views of women

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. "The Dirty Word Game": On a large sheet of paper, encourage participants to write as many slang words as they can think of having to do with sex/sexual anatomy. While they are making their lists, you should write on the sheet words such as "breast," "vagina," and "penis"; then, add the words "elbow" and "knee." After everyone has had a chance to comment on the total compilation, consider:
   - Why do we not hear words like "breast" and "vagina" as often as we hear words like "beaver," "snatch," "tit"?
   - Why are there so many slang words for anything having to do with sex and women's bodies?
   - Why are women often referred to by their sexual anatomy? Does this happen as often for men? Why or why not?
   - How come you know only one word for either elbow or knee?

   As a group, check off all the words on the page referring to women, then the words referring to men. Discuss how sexist and negative language regarding female sexuality reflects male prerogative and power to control women's sexual behavior. Adolescents may need some prompting to see the implications behind this language. "The Dirty Word Game" can be a very provocative activity and needs adequate time to be understood fully.
2. Read the poem "The City to a Young Girl," written by Jody Caravaglia at the age of 15, from the book *Male and Female under 18:*

The city is
one million horny lip-smacking men
Screaming for my body.
The streets are long conveyor belts
Loaded with these suckling pigs.
All begging for
a lay
a little pussy
a bit of tit
a leg to rub against
a handful of ass
the connoisseurs of cunt. . .
I swat them off like flies
but they keep coming back.
I'm a good piece of meat.[1]

---

[1] Jody Caravaglia, "The City to a Young Girl," in *Male and Female under 18*, ed. by Nancy Larrick and Eve Merriam (New York: Avon Books, 1973); p. 95.

Questions you might ask are: What are Jody's feelings about herself? Through whose eyes does she see herself? Can you identify with her?

At the school, most participants identified with Jody's anger and frustrations with men's behavior. Relate the poem to "The Dirty Word Game" so that women can make the connection between language and feeling, and so they can see that their anger is legitimate when a woman is called "a handful of ass."

C. *Resources*

OBOS; Larrick and Merriam, eds., *Male and Female under 18;* and Gates, Klaw, and Steinberg, *Changing Learning, Changing Lives.*

Session Three: A Review of Basic Female Reproductive and Sexual Anatomy

A. *Goals*

1. To provide basic necessary information on female anatomy
2. To make the connection between being better aware of our bodies and being more assertive when we are dealing with the health care system

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Begin a discussion and presentation of female anatomy by asking participants what they feel is important to know in order to understand their bodies better. Responses may range from "I know what is happening when I go for a gynecological exam" to accounts of women having been treated for health problems which were never explained. Take the time to discuss the parts of the body that are unknown, couched in myths and confusion, or relate to larger issues of sexual definition, such as the clitoris, the uterus, the hymen. Review basic male sexual anatomy. Participants at the school felt mystified by "what goes on in a man's body." This discussion is often one part of the process for women who are having sex with men to take a more active role in reproductive and sexual matters.
2. It may be a little embarrassing, but it is important for younger women to realize that they can see their outer genitals and feel the insides of their vagina if they want to. Your message is not that everyone *should* do this, but that it is okay for participants to touch, feel, and explore their own bodies. In this society, most women, particularly adolescents, need encouragement to think of their reproductive and sexual anatomy as a healthy, natural part of themselves. For example, many teenage women are convinced of the need for regular douching, which in itself is not harmful, but too often this douching is a response to a feeling of uncleanliness or shame about one's body, especially after having sex.

C. *Resources*

OBOS: Carney, Fleming, and Lynch, *A Part of Our Lives* (pamphlet); Women's Educational Project, *High School Sexuality* (pamphlet); Gardner-Loulan, Lopez, and Quackenbush, *Period;* Gates, Klaw, and Steinberg, *Changing Learning, Changing Lives;* HealthRight, *Women and Health Packet* (pamphlets).

Session Four: Our Cycles—Ovulation and Menstruation

A. *Goals*

1. To provide clear information on the ovulatory and menstrual cycles, especially as they relate to pregnancy
2. To give women information they need to make more informed choices about pregnancy

3. To look at some of the negative messages our culture perpetuates about women's bodies

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Ovulation and menstruation are covered clearly and simply in most of the resources listed for this session. Use the information creatively.

   It is worth taking the time to explain a usual cycle for a woman, beginning with day one. Most likely, participants will appreciate a thorough explanation of how and when a sperm can fertilize an egg in a woman's body, what a "safe" time of the month means, and how each woman's cycle is unique.

   Discuss how women felt about having their first periods and the circumstances surrounding that event. Most participants can share a story about the first time, which is usually dramatic. Two pamphlets, *A Part of Our Lives* and *What Now?* have good, short statements, written by young women from a variety of backgrounds:

   > My mother told me when I was about twelve years old
   > and I didn't understand at all. I was so embarrassed.
   > I found out off the streets.
   > I stayed out of school for a whole week, I was so scared
   > the first time it happened.[1]

   It is interesting to contrast these women's feelings with those of Anne Frank in *A Diary of a Young Girl:*

   > Each time I have a period—and that has only been
   > three times—I have the feeling that in spite of
   > all the pain, I have a sweet secret. . .[2]

   Encourage participants to compare these thoughts with their own first-time experiences and circumstances.

   Try to confront the fact that a younger woman is likely to feel that her period is a "nasty thing." One way to do this is by discussing some of the myths that have been associated with menstruation and how women were (and still are, in certain cultures) considered "unclean," untouchable, or evil while they were menstruating. Participants may not be ready or willing to shed their own negative or ambivalent feelings, but almost everyone seems relieved to hear someone else say that we should not have to feel "dirty" and inferior.

2. Describe the different natural remedies available to women to alleviate cramps in addition to or in place of aspirin—herbal teas, calcium, warm baths, massages, etc. Many women do not associate their eating habits with cramps. Counter the myth that women cannot be active during their periods.

C. *Resources*

Delaney, Lipton, and Toth, *The Curse;* Gardner-Loulan, Lopez, and Quackenbush, *Period; OBOS;* Gates, Klaw, and Steinberg, *Changing Learning, Changing Lives;* Carney, Fleming, and Lynch, *A Part of Our Lives* (pamphlet); Cherniak and Feingold, *Birth Control Handbook* (pamphlet); Carroll et al., *What Now?* (pamphlet); and *Menstruation.*

Session Five: Birth Control

A. *Goals*

1. To provide clear information on available methods of birth control, including up-to-date information on the risks and benefits of each

---

[1] Caroline Carney, Kathy Fleming, and Mary Beth Lynch, *A Part of Our Lives* (Salem, Massachusetts: Origins, Inc., 1977), p. 8.

[2] Excerpted in Barbara Gates, Susan Klaw, and Adria Steinberg, *Changing Learning, Changing Lives* (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979), p. 65.

2. To encourage women to demand similarly clear and straightforward information and discussion when they seek birth control on their own

As a facilitator among young mothers who had small children (and several young women who were about to become mothers), I often had to struggle to understand why a woman would want to have a child in her adolescence. Yet, there could be no disputing the fact that these women felt quite certain and confident of what they were doing—characteristics society often does not associate with young women of fifteen or sixteen, or even seventeen. I would not suggest that all young mothers or young pregnant women are prepared for the obligations of parenting; nor is it always clear what other options exist (or women think exist). Nevertheless, in order to have even a discussion of what the issues are for a younger woman, you must start with a basic respect for her decision. It is simplistic to assume that you are merely dealing with the consequences of lack of birth control or an unplanned pregnancy. Additionally, many younger women are pressured by men into having sexual intercourse. A young woman may not feel in control of such decisions. Most women are caught between wanting intimacy, on the one hand, and the particular ways in which women are subsumed by male sexuality, on the other hand. Given this situation, it is understandable that younger women are very ambivalent about using birth control. Indeed, a young woman may not really feel she's made a decision for which she should be responsible.

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. There are several ways to present the basic methods of birth control available to women today. For adolescent women in particular, films are helpful, as are samples of birth control devices the women can see and examine. Since most films on birth control offer little analysis of the risks and benefits, you will have to augment the information with more critical, up-to-date facts on such methods as the birth control pill, the IUD, and Encare Oval (this last one in particular is heavily promoted today by the drug industry).

   Encourage women who may know a little more to share their knowledge with others in the group. Discuss the less reliable methods of birth control: douching, withdrawal, and the rhythm method. Stress that *not* every woman should take birth control pills or have an IUD inserted. The point is not to scare young women with the somber facts, but to give participants vital information and to respect their abilities to make informed decisions. Emphasize that a complete medical history must be taken and is a critical part of any visit to a clinic to receive a birth control device.
2. Birth control is not a new invention! Distribute examples of some recipes from the 1800's.[1]

> *Hannay's Preventive Lotion*
> Take pearlash, 1 part; water, 6 parts. Mix and filter. Keep it in close bottles, and use it, with or without soap, immediately after connexion [sexual intercourse].
>
> *Aberhmathy's Preventive Lotion*
> Take bichloride of mercury, 25 parts; milk of almonds, 400 parts; alcohol, 100 parts; rose-water, 1000 parts. Immerse the glands in a little of the mixture, as before, and be particular to open the orifice of the urethra so as to admit the contact of the fluid. This may be used as often as you want, until the urethra feels tender on voiding the urine. This method won't fail if used in proper time.

---

[1] Rosalyn Baxardall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby, eds., *America's Working Women* (New York: Random, 1976), p. 17.

203

Encourage participants to share their knowledge of earlier methods of birth control used by their mothers or grandmothers (see Workshop A, Session Five). For more information and background reading on birth control and abortion as century-old practices, see Resources at the end of this chapter.

3. A discussion of birth control belongs in the context of sex, sexuality, and relationships. You might ask women to consider what they feel affects their beliefs and feelings about sex and birth control. Religion? Parents? Movies and television? Most young women still feel birth control is their burden. Changing these dynamics in personal relationships does not occur without a great deal of struggle. You might also ask: How can men be encouraged to take on equal responsibility for birth control?

C. *Resources*

OBOS; Cherniak and Feingold, *The Birth Control Handbook* (pamphlet); Women's Educational Project, *High School Sexuality: A Teaching Guide* (pamphlet); Dreifus, ed., *Seizing Our Bodies;* Baxardall, Gordon, and Reverby, eds., *America's Working Women;* and *Hope Is Not a Method* (film).

Session Six: Abortion—The Factors We Weigh

A. *Goals*

1. To support younger women in their efforts to make choices and decisions about abortion and motherhood
2. To point out common themes all women face with the abortion decision
3. To discuss popular myths and misinformation concerning abortion
4. To offer a historical context for understanding the legalization of abortion and the recent anti-abortion backlash

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Read the story "The Lonesomes Ain't No Spring Picnic"* by Birthalene Miller. Some questions which might be asked include:
   - Why did the grandmother feel empathy for Sue-Ellen?
   - Why did the grandfather believe Sue-Ellen should be punished?
   - How did Sue-Ellen's death affect Mary Anne?
   - What does the grandmother mean when she says "women always get blamed"?

   The particular setting for the story—a rural, southern town, where the church is the strongest institutional and value-setting force—may be very different from the world experienced by urban women. You may need to help participants recognize the many similarities between their and Sue-Ellen's experiences.

   You might use Sue-Ellen's situation to discuss the shame and guilt women continue to feel, or are made to feel, about abortion and why desperate acts are often seen as the only "out" to a woman who cannot emotionally or financially afford another child.

2. Show the film *Abortion* by Jane Pincus. Remind participants that this film was made in 1971, when abortion was legal in only a few places, such as New York and Washington, D.C. Point out the courage required for women to make an abortion film at that time.

   The film details the lives of different women and the experiences of each in obtaining an abortion in 1971: the expense, the use of underground networks, finding a sympathetic doctor or a doctor interested in the money, and the risks of unsafe methods. The film helps stimulate discussions of the changes that

---

*See Workshop A, Session Five (p. 183), for a description of the story.

204

have occurred since abortion was legalized and the reasons that women continue to seek abortion.

Teenagers will probably want to talk a great deal about parents and abortion: the controversy over parental consent, and other ways a young woman can receive needed emotional support if she cannot tell her parent(s). You might follow court cases involving minors' rights in birth control, sexuality, and abortion.

3. Encourage women to share their knowledge of abortion, abortion clinics, and abortion counseling. Many times participants may be "holding on" to something frightening they have heard about abortion. Comments such as "I hear you could bleed to death" or "My friend saw the nurse put the baby in the garbage" are not infrequent. Although not trying to disprove every horror story or deny the risks involved in abortion, the class can provide invaluable perspective.

It is probably most helpful to have someone who has had an abortion talk realistically and honestly about her experience. This will probably be more convincing than a mere straightforward presentation of the facts. Nonetheless, facts should be shared. It *is* valuable to talk about the dramatic decrease nationwide in complications and mortality among women since the legalization of abortion. If abortion becomes illegal, we will lose the leverage women have gained to ensure good health care and accountability from doctors and clinics. Thus, fighting for the legalization of abortion is fighting for quality health care for women.

C. *Resources*

OBOS; Carroll et al., *What Now?* (pamphlet); Erlien et al., *More than a Choice* (pamphlet); Gates, Klaw, and Steinberg, *Changing Learning, Changing Lives;* Miller, "The Lonesomes Ain't No Spring Picnic"; and the film *Abortion.*

Session Seven: So, Now You Are a Mother. What Is It Like?

A. *Goals*

1. To determine some of the issues and concerns mothers might have in our society
2. To encourage women to think about what is involved in having a child/children of their own

B. *Suggested Activity*

Develop an interview questionnaire for mothers. The following is an example created by participants.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MOTHERS

1. Do you like being a mother? Why or why not?
2. Are you planning to have any more children? Why or why not?
3. Are you a single parent? Yes ________ No ________
   If yes, do you like being a single parent?
4. How many kids do you have? How old are they?
5. Do you like the responsibilities of being a mother?
6. If you got tired of having the responsibilities of a mother, would you ever give your kids up?
7. When you were first pregnant, were you scared?
8. What were you feeling when you had a baby?
9. Where did you have your kids—at home or in the hospital?
10. Did you have a cesarean section?
11. Did you use natural childbirth?
12. When you first told your man you were pregnant, what did he say?
13. Were you awake when your baby was born?

Additional comments, if any, can go here: ______________________________

____

____

Encourage everyone to interview at least two mothers she knows. Spend time as a group helping each participant find mothers to interview.

Discussing motherhood/parenting may not be simple for adolescents, even if there are young mothers in the group. Do not assume that a young woman who has a small child necessarily thinks of herself as a "mother." Depending upon the age and circumstances in a young mother's life (such as living at home with parents or living on her own), the label of "mother" might be rather overwhelming, something a young woman might find more appropriate as a description of her own mother. In addition, the issue of being a mother is especially complex when each group member is struggling with her options concerning motherhood and children. The facilitator should encourage participants to consider the kinds of support, material and otherwise, women need—whether or not they choose to have children. If your sessions can accommodate having participants break into smaller groups, it would be useful for young or expectant mothers to have a specific time to express more immediate health concerns and other child-related issues, e.g., as housing, child care and employment.

C. *Resources*

Lerner, *Black Women in White America; OBOS;* Guffy, *The Autobiography of a Black Woman;* Gates, Klaw, and Steinberg, *Changing Learning, Changing Lives;* and Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.*

Session Eight: Childbirth/Childbearing

A. *Goals*

1. To explore the politics in the struggles for more community control over health care, especially women's health care
2. To discuss women's control over birthing via home birth and natural childbirth

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Show the film *The Chicago Maternity Story.* The Center began in the 1930's. It has continually provided low-income women with low-cost, high-quality pre- and post-natal health care, using home birth as an alternative to the costly and often unsafe obstetrical practices of big hospitals. The film records the Center's history, its goals, its struggles to remain open in the early 1970's after seventy-five years of service to a largely Third World community, and the eventual closing of the center because of pressures from doctors and powerful hospitals.

Because the film is in two parts, you will probably need more than one session to allow for both viewing and discussion. Before watching the film, ask participants to consider the following questions: Why do so many women want the Center to remain open? What do they feel are the advantages of having a home birth as opposed to a hospital birth? What does a midwife do?

Most adolescent women are fascinated by watching a live birth on film. Because the woman in the film gives birth at home, is under no anesthesia, and uses breathing exercises, participants can actually see and hear the physical and emotional process a woman goes through in the last stages of labor and delivery. The woman's delight in being awake and conscious during childbirth can present a very exciting possibility to participants who had not considered natural childbirth before.

Discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of home birth, natural childbirth, and hospital birth that uses drugs and anesthesia. It is important to show that there are alternatives to the medical institutions, hospitals, medications, and doctors we are all brought up to believe in.

Some participants told stories of their mother or grandmother having given birth at home while another woman acted as the midwife. These examples led to discussions of the medical/healing skills women have historically possessed and passed on from one generation to the next—many of which survived the rise of medical schools and training exclusively for white men in the United States and Europe.

2. Invite a woman who is a health care provider specializing in childbirth to talk with the group, answer questions, and demystify the practice of home birth and childbirth in general. You might also invite someone who has experienced a home birth and/or natural childbirth.

C. *Resources*

OBOS; Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses;* Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good;* Corea, *The Hidden Malpractice;* and the film *The Chicago Maternity Story.*

Session Nine: A Visit to a Feminist Health Center*

A. *Goals*

1. To expose participants to the existence and practices of an alternative health care facility, owned and operated by women committed to changing health care for all women
2. To provide participants with the opportunity to ask questions of health care workers
3. To learn firsthand the principles of a good gynecological exam
4. To give women confidence to seek high quality treatment in other health care facilities

B. *Suggested Activity*

Visit a feminist health clinic. Spend time beforehand clarifying the interests and concerns of the participants and of the health workers who will be responsible for your group.

A visit to a feminist health center is likely to be a first for many of the participants. It can be an extremely positive and reinforcing experience if you arrange for sufficient time to be given to participants' questions and concerns. It is a good idea to ensure that the clinic's spokeswoman shares your goals and a sense of flexibility concerning what she hopes to cover in the session.

In my group, participants were given the choice of viewing a slide show on self-help or watching an actual self-help gynecological exam demonstrated by two women. Most of the women chose to watch the gynecological exam. This was a significant indication that it was gradually becoming less strange and embarrassing for participants to better know and understand their bodies.

Although most participants felt some nervousness during the demonstration, it was established by the facilitator and clinic workers as an understandable reaction. This was the first time these adolescents had ever *observed* a gynecological exam and one in which the patient actively participated in all of the procedures. Everyone was able to understand further why certain procedures are done in a gynecological exam, what infections should be tested for, and how a gynecological exam can be made more comfortable for a woman.

If the feminist health center is not readily accessible to the women in your group, it may be unlikely that they will return to that particular clinic. Thus, you should be able to extrapolate from the visit those values and practices that

---

*The goals of this activity can also be achieved by using films, slide shows, and literature available from a feminist health center. See Resources for listings.

207

should be generally evident in all health care facilities. A visit to a local health care facility as well might be a good idea. Encourage women who use other health facilities to ask that educational resources (slide shows, plastic specula, *OBOS*), which they know are available at women's health centers, be made available in neighborhood clinics as well.

C. *Resources*

OBOS; fact sheets from the women's health clinic you visit; plastic specula; and Cherniak and Feingold, *Birth Control Handbook* (pamphlet).

Session Ten: Occupational Health and Safety

A. *Goals*

1. To explore the effects that different kinds of paid work, especially those jobs women usually hold, have on our health
2. To introduce participants to women who offer assistance to people concerned with occupational health and safety

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Ask participants to write down as many jobs as they can think of, including the job (if any) they presently hold. Next to each job, ask them to list what they think are the health hazards. It is best *not* to define "health hazard" ahead of time; later, as a group, write a definition based on the concerns and information the participants share.

   Most people associate health hazards with those which have gained some public attention in the last several years, e.g., asbestos poisoning, black lung disease, brown lung disease, and radiation poisoning from nuclear power work. It may not occur to participants to consider that there are also health hazards involved in jobs where most women are found: clerical work, cleaning, waitressing, and hospital work.
2. Invite guests who work with occupational health and safety to discuss their work and their concerns. Guests should prepare information on any health hazards likely to be found in the kinds of work participants have done.

   It can be reassuring for women to realize that others share their frustrations and stresses on a particular job. Doing endless errands for a boss, sitting in one position typing all day, cleaning with strong solvents, being on their feet all day are examples of experiences many women have had. Include a description of how chemicals actually enter the body and affect vital organs and systems. Specific chemicals like lead and radiation are very dangerous to a woman's reproductive system; thus, this discussion is vital. Discuss what it means for a woman to have her tubes tied (be sterilized) as a condition for being able to retain work in areas where dangerous chemicals are in use.
3. Take a field trip to a factory or other work site that employs large numbers of women. Encourage participants to be on the lookout for health and safety violations and to make up a report of their findings.
4. Sexual harassment on the job, which may well be a part of the participants' work histories, is another topic for discussion. Labeling this a "job hazard" can help participants understand that when a woman quits or loses her job because of unwanted sexual advances, the blame belongs to the employer, not to the particular woman. It was exciting for my group to hear that more women are challenging employers for this behavior in an organized way, such as fighting for anti-sexual-harassment clauses in union contracts.

C. *Resources*

Fact sheets on health and safety (provided by guest speakers); Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, *Fighting Sexual Harassment* (pamphlet); Health Policy Advisory Center's *Health Pac Bulletins* (see the Organizations category of the Resources section); and *Southern Exposure's* special issue *Sick for Justice*.

Session Eleven: Taking Care of Our Bodies

A. *Goals*

1. To give women more knowledge and control when dealing with the health care system for treatment of common gynecological problems
2. To encourage women to see their everyday habits (e.g., eating, sleeping, exercise) as integral to staying healthy and preventing sickness
3. To offer preventive measures against infections and to encourage women to be generally more aware of their bodies

B. *Suggested Activity*

Spend some time studying common infections such as yeast infections, trichomoniasis ("trich"), vaginitis, cystitis, herpes, crabs, and scabies. In addition, explain common symptoms and causes for the more serious gonorrhea, syphilis, and pelvic inflammatory disease (P.I.D.). Time limitations may mean choosing a few infections to discuss in detail, and then reviewing the preventive measures for several other general infections. It is helpful, however, for participants to actually *see* and hear the different names of the most common infections and to learn the most basic characteristics and distinctions.

Ask participants to identify infections they might have had or for which they might have been treated. Ask if they were given any explanation of the nature of their infection and the medication they were given. If possible, explain some of the medications frequently prescribed and possible alternative natural remedies. Often it has never occurred to a woman that remedies for infections might exist in anything but a prescription. Additional points that could be covered include adolescents' feelings of embarrassment which keep them from going to a doctor or clinic.

C. *Resources*

Odsess and Hurwitz, *Taking Control* (pamphlet); Cherniak and Feingold, *The VD Handbook* (pamphlet); and Women's Educational Project, *High School Sexuality: A Teaching Guide* (pamphlet).

Session Twelve: Food and Nutrition

A. *Goals*

Please refer to Workshop A, Sessions Two and Three (pp. 181–182).

B. *Suggested Activities*

1. Invite someone who works with food and nutrition to visit the group. Participants may respond very well to someone who is a positive role model. At the school, an older woman in her seventies who has been a vegetarian for fifty-five years and a political activist all her life, co-facilitated this workshop. She approached the group with a sincere respect for their own food choices and life circumstances without assuming that her own choice of being a vegetarian made sense or was even feasible for many of the women in the program. She was sensitive to the class and racial background of the participants and offered examples familiar to the women.
2. Have everyone list and share what she has eaten in the past twenty-four hours. Hand out a *Food Scorecard* to each participant, explain the basic use of the scorecard, and have everyone work on matching the food she has written down with a nutrition score in the booklet.

The group members need to be able to recognize their eating habits in a discussion of nutrition. The *Food Scorecard* is an extremely creative tool for connecting personal habits to healthy eating. It also explains very clearly the criteria for the content of vitamins, minerals, fat, salt, or sugar by which a food loses or gains points. Encourage the participants to view their scores not as a fixed judgment, but as a measure of the process of becoming more nutritionally aware.

C. *Resources*
OBOS; Katz and Goodwin, *Food;* Jacobson and Wilson, *Food Scorecard* (pamphlet); and Berkeley Women's Health Collective, *Feeding Ourselves* (pamphlet).

Session Thirteen: Violence against Women

A. *Goals*
1. To understand the connection between any single act of rape, or other violence, against women of all races and classes in our society
2. To examine the complex psychological and physical consequences of violence directed against women
3. To assist women in learning where to find help if they become the victims of violence
4. To break down the sexist and racist mythology that deems women responsible for sexual assault and general violence against them

B. *Suggested Activities*
1. Show at least one of the many films and videotapes available on the subject of rape, one of which shares both the personal struggles of women who have been victims of rape and the organizing being done against rape.

   Using a film or videotape in which women "somewhere else" discuss their experiences is often the least threatening way to begin. The particular videotape shown to participants, "Rape: The Reality," covers issues which are central to a discussion of rape:
   - Personal experiences of rape victims
   - Challenges to men's attitude that women provoke rape
   - The frequent harassment women experience through involvement with the police and the courts
   - Support groups for rape victims
   - Rape hotlines
   - Self-defense
   - Working for better legislation

   This particular videotape shows no women of color, although violence against women of color is discussed. This weakness of the videotape is that it can create a false picture that only white women are the victims of rape, leaving, understandably, gaps for Third World teenagers. When using such a film, supplement it with literature that discusses violence against Third World women. New materials are coming out each year from projects throughout the country. Look as well for local projects that may be organizing to combat violence against women.
2. Use educational information that presents basic safety precautions women can use to better protect themselves from sexual assault and violence. *Eleven Black Women . . . Why Did They Die?*—a brochure produced by a collective of Black feminists in 1979—is an excellent example.* Published as an organizing tool to reach more Third World women in the wake of a string of murders of Black women in Boston, the brochure contains both practical safety information and a feminist perspective of the racism and sexism that lead to violence against women of color in particular.

---

*The brochure is reprinted in this chapter on pages 201–202.

After reading this brochure, participants in my group affirmed their feelings of fear and concern as young Black women living in the same neighborhoods where the recent murders had taken place. As Lorraine Bethel points out in "Black Women's Culture," Chapter 5 of this book, violence against women, especially against Black women, constantly undermines the strength to be active and visible.

In discussing safety issues with participants, begin by asking participants to share precautions already exercised in their daily routines. Interestingly enough, many adolescent women at the school felt that the strongest way for women to combat violence was to learn self-defense. While this certainly expresses women wanting to feel stronger in general and less afraid of men, with this particular group of women, it also reflected the feeling of "you can't count on anyone except yourself." Talking about women and people in neighborhoods, watching out for one another, and building neighborhood safety networks can seem abstract to women if these activities do not match their own sense of whether people can be trusted on their block. An example you could provide of how people in neighborhoods can and should protect their residents, especially women and young children, is the growth of the "Safe House" concept and practice throughout communities in several cities.*

C. *Resources*

Combahee River Collective, *Eleven Black Women . . . Why Did They Die?* (brochure, reprinted in this chapter); *OBOS;* literature from a local rape crises hotline; *Heresies,* "On Women and Violence"; Shange, "With No Immediate Cause"; *Rape: The Reality* (film); and *We Will Not Be Beaten* (film).

Rachel Burger

---

*A Safe House is a home that bears some recognizable insignia in the window, a symbol visible at night, such as a brightly colored light bulb. It is a place a woman can go to for help and refuge if she is in danger.

CONCLUSION

No one introductory workshop on women's health care could even begin to respond to all the needs of its participants. However, all of the women who participated in at least a few of the sessions felt they had learned new information that would be useful to them in dealing with the health care system. Specifically, knowing how their bodies work, taking better care of themselves, nutrition, birth control, childbirth, and abortion were all areas participants highlighted.

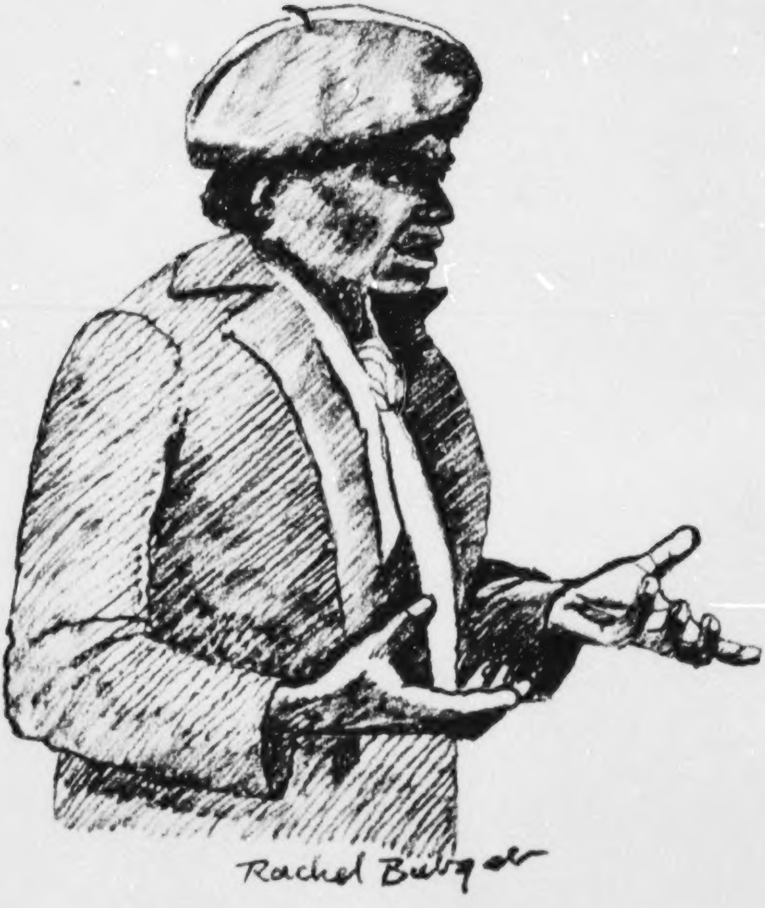
One of the central goals of the workshop series was to try to break down barriers that keep women apart and isolated. During the health workshops, many women *talked* for the first time about what were felt to be very private concerns. They discovered that many of their concerns are common struggles all women face. This realization helped women see that they deserve much better quality treatment from all levels of the health care system. For example, the visit to the feminist health center had a lasting effect on the young women, who saw a health care institution that could be helpful and accountable and was a place they would not feel afraid to visit. The visit to the health center, as well as the presentation by speakers, gave women exposure to other women working to change the health care system as it is presently organized and run.

The health workshops were additionally able to combat some of the fragmentation women experience when dealing with traditional medical care systems. That is, the workshop series tried to deal with *all* levels of how women live and feel, and challenged the ways in which most doctors treat disease as though it were independent of the whole person.

For future workshop series on health, I would recommend that you include some introductory discussions of the health care industry and women as health care workers. Guest speakers who work in health care could be invited to discuss their experiences. Such information could be especially valuable for participants who are looking for support in their own job aspirations in the health care field.

I would also recommend that you build into a women's health workshop more explicit discussion of sexuality, especially among younger women. Sexuality issues are a dimension of most of the topics, but individual sessions do not develop issues which could arise around relationships with men, sexual pleasure for women, or homosexuality.

In conclusion, women who participated in the workshop series are beginning to take both their health needs and their overall needs as women more seriously. At the school participants received a great deal from the discussions on rape, sexual harassment and motherhood. For women in the alcoholism treatment program, even an introductory health workshop gave them more courage to renew their psyche and physical strength. For both groups of women, the workshop series offered concrete information on how to interact with the health care system and how to become involved in preventive health practices. It is my hope that this newly acquired knowledge will be the basis for the women's long-term, active participation in determining the kind of health care they want and in questioning and challenging the health care systems of the future.


Rachel Burger

REPRINT OF BROCHURE: ELEVEN BLACK WOMEN . . . WHY DID THEY DIE?[1]

Recently eleven young Black women have been murdered in Roxbury, Dorchester and the South End (in Massachusetts). The entire Black community continues to mourn their cruel and brutal deaths. In the face of police indifference and media lies and despite our grief and anger, we have begun to organize ourselves in order to figure out ways to protect ourselves and our sisters, to make the streets safe for women.

We are writing this pamphlet because as Black feminist activists we think it is essential to understand the social and political causes behind these sisters' deaths. We also want to share information about safety measures every woman can take and list groups who are working on the issue of violence against women.

In the Black community the murders have often been talked about as solely racial or racist crimes. It's true that the police and media response has been typically racist. It's true that the victims were all Black and that Black people have always been targets of racist violence in this society, but they were also *all women*. Our sisters died *because* they were women just as surely as they died because they were Black. If the murders were only racial, young teen-age boys and older Black men might also have been the unfortunate victims. They might now be petrified to walk the streets as women have always been.

When we look at the statistics and hard facts about daily, socially acceptable violence against women, it's clear it's no "bizarre series of coincidences" that all six victims were female.[2] In the U.S.A. 1 out of 3 women will be raped in their lifetimes or ⅓ of *all* the women in this country; at least 1 woman is beaten by her husband or boyfriend every 18 seconds; 1 out of every 4 women experiences some form of sexual abuse *before* she reaches the age of 18 (child molesting, rape, and incest) 75% of the time by someone they know and 38% of the time by a family member, 9 out of 10 women in a recent survey had received unwanted sexual advances and harassment at their jobs.[3] Another way to think about these figures is that while you have been reading this pamphlet a woman somewhere in this city, in this state, in this country has been beaten, raped and even murdered.

These statistics apply to all women: Black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, old, young, rich, poor and in between. We've got to understand that violence against us as women cuts across all racial, ethnic and class lines. This doesn't mean that violence against Third World women does not have a racial as well as sexual cause. Both our race and sex lead to violence against us.

---

[1] Combahee River Collective, *Eleven Black Women . . . Why Did They Die?* (Boston, Massachusetts: Combahee River Collective, 1979).

[2] *Boston Globe*, April 1, 1979, p. 16.

[3] Statistics from the paper "Grass Roots Services for Battered Women: A Model for Long Term Change" by Lisa Leghorn. Available from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C.

214

One reason that attacks on women are so widespread is that to keep us down, to keep us oppressed we have to be made afraid. Violence makes us feel powerless and also like we're second best.

The society also constantly encourages the violence through the media: movies, pornography, *Playboy, Players, Hustler, JET,* record covers, advertisements and disco songs ("Put Love's Chains Back On Me"). Boys and men get the message every day that it's all right [and] even fun to hurt women. What has happened in Boston's Black community is a thread in the fabric of violence against women.

Another idea that has been put out in this crisis is that women should stay in the house until the murderer(s) [is] found. In other words Black women should be under house arrest. . . . Staying in the house punishes the innocent and protects the guilty. It also doesn't take into account real life, that we must go to work, get food, pick up the kids at school, do the wash, do errands and visit friends. Women should be able to walk outside whenever they please, with whoever they please and for whatever reason.

WE WILL ONLY HAVE THIS RIGHT WHEN WOMEN JOIN TOGETHER TO DEMAND OUR RIGHTS AS HUMAN BEINGS TO BE FREE OF PHYSICAL ABUSE, TO BE FREE OF FEAR.

The last idea we want to respond to is that it's men's job to protect women. At first glance this may seem to make sense, but look at the assumptions behind it. Needing to be protected assumes that we are weak, helpless and dependent, that we are victims who need men to protect us from other men. As women in this society we are definitely at risk as far as violence is concerned but WE HAVE TO LEARN TO PROTECT OURSELVES. There are many ways to do this: learning and following common sense safety measures, learning self-defense, setting up phone chains and neighborhood safe-houses, joining and working in groups that are organizing against violence against women are all ways to do this.

The idea of men protecting us isn't very realistic because many of us don't have a man to depend upon for this—young girls, teen-agers, single women, separated and divorced women, lesbians, widowed women and elderly women. And even if we do have a man he cannot be our shadow 24 hours a day.

What men can do to "protect" us is to check out the ways in which they put down and intimidate women in the streets and at home, to stop being verbally and physically abusive to us and to tell men they know who mistreat women to stop it and stop it quick. Men who are committed to stopping violence against women should start *seriously* discussing this issue with other men and organizing in supportive ways.

We decided to write this pamphlet because of our outrage at what has happened to eleven Black women and to 1000s and 1000s of women whose names we don't even know. As Black women who are feminists we are struggling against all racist, sexist, heterosexist and class oppression. We know that we have no hopes of ending this particular crisis and violence against women in our community until we identify *all* of its causes, including sexual oppression. . .

RESOURCES

RESOURCES FOR WORKSHOPS A AND B

Books

Angelou, Maya, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* New York: Bantam, 1971.

Baxardall, Rosalyn, et al., eds. *America's Working Women.* New York: Random House, 1976.

Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women.* Second Edition. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976. Free copies are available to low-income women. Spanish translation of text is also available: *Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas.* Write to the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Box 192, Somerville, Massachusetts 02144.

Chamberlain, Judi. *On Our Own: Patient Controlled Alternatives to the Mental Health System.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.

Corea, Gena. *The Hidden Malpractice: How American Medicine Mistreats Women.* New York: Jove Publications, 1978.

Delaney, Janice; Mary J. Lipton; and Emily Toth. *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation.* New York: New American Library, 1977.

Demarest, Robert J., and John J. Sciarra. *Conception, Birth and Contraception: A Visual Presentation.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969.

Dreifus, Claudia, ed. *Seizing Our Bodies: The Politics of Women's Health.* New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Expert's Advice to Women.* New York: Doubleday and Co., 1979.

____________. *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness.* Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1973.

____________. *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers.* Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1973.

Gardner-Loulan, JoAnn; Bonnie Lopez; and Marcia Quackenbush. *Period.* Burlingame, California: My Mama's Press, 1979.

Gates, Barbara; Susan Klaw; and Adria Steinberg. *Changing Learning, Changing Lives: A High School Women's Studies Curriculum from the Group School.* Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979.

Gordon, Linda. *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America.* New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Guffy, Ossie. *The Autobiography of a Black Woman* (as told to Caryl Ledner). New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

Katz, Deborah, and Mary T. Goodwin. *Food: Where Nutrition, Politics and Culture Meet: An Activities Guide for Teachers.* Washington, D.C.: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1976.

Lappe, Francis Moore. *Diet for a Small Planet.* Revised Edition. New York: Ballantine Books, 1975.

Larrick, Nancy, and Eve Merriam, eds. *Male and Female under 18.* New York: Avon Books, 1973.

Lerner, Gerda, ed. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History.* New York: Random House, 1973.

Walker, Alice. *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.

Pamphlets

Alliance Against Sexual Coercion. *Fighting Sexual Harassment: An Advocacy Handbook.* Boston: Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, 1979. To order copies, write to: AASC, P.O. Box 1, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

Berkeley Women's Health Collective. *Feeding Ourselves.* Somerville, Mass.: New England Free Press, 1972.

Bloom, Shery U., et al. *Off the Couch: A Woman's Guide to Therapy.* Boston, Massachusetts, 1975.

Carney, Caroline; Kathy Fleming; and Mary Beth Lynch. *A Part of Our Lives: A Discussion of Sexuality and Birth Control by Young Women and for Young Women.* Salem, Massachusetts: Origins, Inc., 1977. Also available in Spanish.

Carroll, Linda; Diane LaBelle; Valerie Wooldridge; and Laurie Zarkowsky. *What Now? Under 18 and Pregnant: A Discussion of Pregnancy and Abortion for Young Women by Young Women.* Salem, Massachusetts: Origins, Inc., 1976. Also available in Spanish. For copies, write to Origins, Inc., 169 Boston Street, Salem, Massachusetts 01970.

Cherniak, Donna, and Allan Feingold. *Birth Control Handbook.* Montreal: Montreal Health Press, 1975.

______________ . *VD Handbook.* Montreal: Montreal Health Press, 1975.

Combahee River Collective. *Eleven Black Women . . . Why Did They Die?* Boston: Combahee River Collective, 1979. Also available in Spanish. To order, write AASC, P.O. Box 1, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Send 50¢.

Ellis, Judith. *Nutrition for Women.* Adapted from *Nutrition During Pregnancy.* San Francisco: Planned Parenthood, 1976. To order, write Planned Parenthood, 1660 Bush Street, San Francisco, California 94109.

Erlien, Maria; Madge Kaplan; Julie Palmer; and Sandi Stein. *More than a Choice: Women Talk about Abortion.* Boston: New England Free Press, 1979. To order, write to New England Free Press, 60 Union Square, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143. *More than a Choice* offers an interesting and readable discussion of issues in the wave of anti-abortion activity. It presents the need for women to be more public about their support for women to make their own choice.

HealthRight. *Women and Health Packet.* New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1975. Contains following pamphlets: Menopause, Infections of the Vagina, What Can One Woman Do? The Gynecological Check-up, Vacuum Aspiration Abortion, Saline Abortion, Breast Cancer: Facts a Woman Needs to Know. To order, see Organization listings in this section.

Jacobson, Michael F., and Wendy Wilson. *Food Scorecard.* Washington, D.C.: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1974.

______________ . *Nutrition Scorecard* (poster). Washington, D.C.: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1978.

Odsess, Carol, and Deena Hurwitz. *Taking Control: A Guide of Self-Healing for Women.* Santa Cruz, California: Odsess and Hurwitz, 1978.

Red Sun Press and Preterm Writing Collective, eds. *Getting Stronger: Women Workers Organize the Abortion Clinics.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Red Sun Press, 1978.

Women's Educational Project. *High School Sexuality: A Teaching Guide*. Eugene, Oregon: Amazon Reality, 1977.

Journals, Articles, Stories, Poems

Brodkey, Amy, Rachel Fruchter, et al. "Women and the Health System." *Health Pac Bulletin #40, April 1972.* New York: Health Policy Advisory Center, 1972.

Caress, Barbara. "Sterilization: Women Fit to Be Tied." *Health Pac Bulletin #62, Jan./Feb., 1975.* New York: Health Policy Advisory Center, 1975.

Eagan, Andrea Boroff. "Breast Cancer: Facts a Woman Needs to Know." *HealthRight,* Vol. 2, No. 3, 1976. New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1976.

Heresies, "On Women and Violence," Vol. 2, No. 2, Issue 6. New York: Heresies Collective, Inc., 1978.

Lieberman, Sharon. "A Hospital Is Not a Home." *HealthRight,* Vol. 3, No. 4 (Fall 1977). New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1977.

McTigue, Sharon. "Lost and Found: The Ovulation Method of Natural Birth Control." *HealthRight,* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 1978). New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1978.

____________. "Taking Our Bodies Back." *HealthRight,* Vol. 3., No. 4 (Fall 1977). New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1977.

Miller, Birthalene. "The Lonesomes Ain't No Spring Picnic." *Southern Exposure,* Special Issue: *Generations. Women in the South,* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter 1977), pp. 86–91. Available from P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

Morgan, Susanne. "War on the Womb." *HealthRight,* Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer 1978). New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1978.

Piercy, Marge. "The Barbie Doll." *To Be of Use.* New York: Doubleday and Co., 1973.

Shange, Ntozake. "With No Immediate Cause." *Nappy Edges.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.

Southern Exposure, Special Issue: *Sick for Justice,* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1977). Available from P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

Williamson, Suzanne. "Anti-Abortion Storm Troopers Strike." *HealthRight,* Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer 1978). New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1978.

____________, and Belinda Sifford. "Crimes against Women: Healthcare in Prisons." *HealthRight,* Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer 1978). New York: HealthRight Inc., 1978.

Wilson, Angela. "Black Women's Health." *HealthRight,* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 1976–77). New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1976–77.

Nonprint Media

Abortion. Film available from Jane Pincus, P.O. Box 72, Roxbury, Vermont 05669.

All in a Day's Work: It's a Dirty Story. Slide show available from the Health and Safety Group, Urban Planning Aid, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116.

The Big Dinner Table. Film available from New England Food and Dairy Council, 1034 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02215. Check also for local distribution.

The Chicago Maternity Story. Film available from Star Films, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116. Also available from Kartemquin/Haymarket Films, 1901 West Wellington Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60657.

Diet for a Small Planet. Film available from American Friends Service Committee, 2161 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140. Bull Frog Films, Oley, Pennsylvania 19547.

Eat, Drink and Be Wary. Film available from Boston University, Educational Film Library, Boston, Massachusetts 02215.

Hope Is Not a Method. Film available from Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts. Check also for local distribution. Available from 99 Bishop Richard Allen Drive, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

Rape: The Reality. Videotape available from the Media Group, Urban Planning Aid, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116.

Stresses or Symptoms: Women and Mental Health. Videotape available from Urban Planning Aid, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116.

Taking Our Bodies Back. Film available from Cambridge Documentary Films, Inc., Box 385, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

We Will Not Be Beaten. Film available from Transition House Films, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116.

Organizations: Educational, Research, and Activist

Boston Women's Health Book Collective. P.O. Box 192, Somerville, Massachusetts 02144. Write for information on resources and monthly health packets. Has up-to-date information on women's health issues locally and nationally.

Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1755 S Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Write for their list of publications and resources. Nutrition curricula, posters, and teaching materials.

Feminist Women's Health Center and Women's Choice Clinic, 1112 South Crenshaw Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90005.

Health Policy Advisory Center, 17 Murray Street, New York, New York 10007. (San Francisco Office: 558 Capp Street, San Francisco, California 94110.) Write for list of pamphlets and reprints. Publishes *Health Pac Bulletin.* Back issues available.

HealthRight—Women's Health Forum, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010. Publishes *HealthRight,* quarterly women's health journal. Back issues available. Write for complete list of resources.

National Women's Health Network, P.O. Box 24192, Washington, D.C. 20024. Publishes *Network News.* National clearinghouse on women's health concerns and legislation. Write for list of resources and activities.

Santa Cruz Women's Health Center, 250 Locust Street, Santa Cruz, California 95060. Write for list of publications and resources.

Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Check local hospitals and neighborhood clinics for this Federal nutrition program for low-income women and their children. Nutrition literature available in several languages.

Women's Community Health Center, Inc., 639 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Write for list of publications and resources. Reprints available at minimal cost. Offers information on self-help and self-examination through use of a plastic speculum.

SUGGESTED BACKGROUND READING

A very selective list of additional materials relevant to a workshop series on women and health care.

Bibliographies

Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Women and Health: Issues and Alternatives—A Guide to Readings in the Academic, Medical and Lay Literature.* Somerville, Massachusetts: Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1977. To order, write to BWHBC at their address listed under Organizations.

Cowan, Belita. *Women's Health Care: Resources, Writings, Bibliographies.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Anshen Publishing, 1978. To order, write to the National Women's Health Network at their address listed under Organizations.

Frank, K. Portland. *The Anti-Psychiatry Bibliography and Resource Guide.* Vancouver, British Columbia: Press Gang Publishers, 1979.

National Women's Health Network. *Health Resources Guides.* Washington, D.C.: National Women's Health Network, 1979. Nine resource guides on Menopause, Hysterectomy, Breast Cancer, Childbirth, DES, Self-Help, Birth Control, Abortion, and Sterilization, all with complete bibliographies. For more information, write to the Network at their Washington address: 2025 I Street NW, Suite 105, Washington, D.C. 20006.

Proceedings for the 1975 Conference on Women and Health, Boston, April 4–7, 1975. Reprinted in the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (see p. 203).

Rosenberg, Ken and Gordon Schiff. *The Politics of Health Care.* Boston: Medical Committee for Human Rights, 1972. To order, write the New England Free Press, 60 Union Square, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143.

Ruzek, Sheryl K. *Women and Health Care: A Bibliography.* Evanston, Illinois: Center for Study of Women in Society, Scientific Analysis Corporation, 1975. To order, write the Program on Women, Northwestern University, 619 Emerson Street, Evanston, Illinois 60201.

Women's History Research Center. *Women's Health/Mental Health.* Berkeley, California: Women's History Research Center, 1977. For more information, write Women's History Research Center, 2325 Oak Street, Berkeley, California 94708.

Women's Occupational Health Resource Center. *Basic Training.* New York: Women's Occupational Health Resource Center. To order, write to WOHRC–American Health Foundation, 320 East 43rd Street, New York, New York 10017.

Books, Pamphlets, Journals

Annas, George. *The Rights of Hospital Patients.* New York: Avon, 1975.

Archiprete, Garbarino Polkin, et al. *The Abortion Business: A Report on Free Standing Clinics.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Women's Research Action Projects, 1975.

Armstrong, Louise. *Kiss Daddy Goodnight: A Speak-Out on Incest.* New York: Pocket Books, 1979.

Bell, Susan. "Political Gynecology: Gynecological Imperialism and the Politics of Self-Help." *Science for the People,* Vol. 11, No. 5 (September/October 1979). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Science for the People, 1979.

Boston Nurses Group. "The False Promise: Professionalism in Nursing." *Science for the People*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (May/June 1978). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Science for the People, 1978.

Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Ourselves and Our Children: A Book by and for Parents.* New York: Random House, 1978.

Bottled-Up Women. New Britain, Connecticut: Prudence Crandall Center for Women, 1975. A packet of articles on women and alcoholism, including "So What's So Different about Women Who Drink?" To order, write the Prudence Crandall Center for Women, P.O. Box 895, New Britain, Connecticut 06050.

Campbell, Margaret A. (pseudonym). *Why Would a Girl Go into Medicine?* Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1973.

Chetin, Helen. *Frances Ann Speaks Out: My Father Raped Me.* Stanford, California: New Seed Press, 1977.

Clark, Lorenne, and Debra Lewis. *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality.* Toronto: The Women's Press, 1977.

Coalition for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA). *Women under Attack.* New York: CARASA, 1979.

Diamond, Liz. *The Lesbian Primer.* Salem, Massachusetts: Women's Educational Media, Inc., 1979.

Fat Liberator Publications. New Haven, Connecticut: New Haven Fat Liberation Front, 1978. To order, write to Fat Liberator Publications, P.O. Box 342, New Haven, Connecticut 06513.

Hall, Nancy Lee. *A True Story of a Drunken Mother.* Plainfield, Vermont: Daughters, Inc., 1974.

Health Policy Advisory Committee, ed. *American Health Empire: Power, Profits, Politics.* New York: Random House, 1971.

HealthRight. "A View from the Loop: The Women's Health Movement in Chicago." *HealthRight*, Fall 1975. New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1975.

Howell, Mary C. *Healing at Home: A Guide to Health Care for Children.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.

ISIS: International Bulletin. Special issue on "Women and Health." Rome, Italy, and Geneva, Switzerland: ISIS, Spring 1978.

Jacobson, Michael F. *Nutrition Scoreboard: Your Guide to Better Eating.* New York: Avon Books, 1974.

Lesbian Health Information Project. *Artificial Insemination: An Alternative Conception.* San Francisco: Lesbian Health and Information Project, 1979. To order, write San Francisco Women's Centers, 3543 18th Street, San Francisco, California 94110.

MacKeith, Nancy. *The New Women's Health Handbook.* London: Virago, 1978.

Martin, Del. *Battered Wives.* New York: Pocket Books, 1977.

O'Donnell, Mary. "Lesbian Health Care: Issues and Literature." *Science for the People.* Vol. 10, No. 3 (May/June 1978). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Science for the People, 1978.

____________, et al. *Lesbian Health Matters! A Resource Book about Lesbian Health.* Santa Cruz, California: Santa Cruz Women's Health Collective, 1979. To order, write to Santa Cruz Women's Health Center, address listed under Organizations.

Project Outside/Inside. *A Design for Health.* Somerville, Massachusetts: Somerville School Department, 1979. To order, write Project Outside/Inside, Somerville Public Schools, 81 Highland Avenue, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143.

_____________ . *Food for the Health of It: A High School Nutrition Curriculum.* Somerville, Massachusetts: Somerville School Department, 1978. To order, write to the Project at the address above.

Reitz, Rosetta. *Menopause: A Positive Approach.* Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Co., 1979.

Ruzek, Sheryl. *The Women's Health Movement: Feminist Alternatives to Medical Control.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978.

Seaman, Barbara, and Gideon Seaman. *Woman and the Crisis in Sex Hormones.* New York: Bantam Books, 1978.

Seven Days. Special issue: "Women's Health," Vol. 2, No. 4 (May 5, 1978). New York: Institute for New Communications, Inc., 1978.

Smith, Dorothy E., and Sara J. David, eds. *Women Look at Psychiatry.* Vancouver, British Columbia: Press Gang Publishers, 1975.

Vida, Ginny, ed. *Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1978.

Weiss, Kay. "What Medical Students Learn about Women." *Off Our Backs,* April–May 1975. Washington, D.C.: Off Our Backs, 1975.

Youth Liberation. *Growing Up Gay.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Youth Liberation Press, Inc., 1978. Order this pamphlet from Youth Liberation, 2007 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104.

_____________ . *High School Women's Liberation.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Youth Liberation Press, Inc., 1976. Order this pamphlet from Youth Liberation at the address above.

Third World Women and Health Care

Cade, Toni, ed. *The Black Woman: An Anthology.* New York: Signet, 1970.

"Crimes in the Clinic: A Report on Boston City Hospital." *The Second Wave,* Vol. 2, No. 3 (1973). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Second Wave, 1973.

Ferris, Louanne. *I'm Done Crying.* New York: New American Library, 1970.

Herman, Judith. "Fighting Sterilization Abuse." *Science for the People,* Vol. 9, No. 1 (January/February 1977). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Science for the People, 1977.

Kotelchuck, David. "Work, Race and Health." *Health Pac Bulletin* (reprint), September/October 1977. New York: Health Policy Advisory Center, 1977.

Ladner, Joyce A. *Tomorrow's Tomorrow.* New York: Doubleday and Co., 1971.

Margulies, Leah. "Exporting Infant Nutrition." *HealthRight,* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 1977). New York: HealthRight, Inc., 1977.

McKnight, John L. "Organizing for Community Health in Chicago." *Science for the People,* Vol. 10, No. 6 (November/December 1978). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Science for the People, 1978.

Mini-Consultation on the Mental and Physical Health Problems of Black Women, March 29–30, 1974. Washington, D.C.: Black Women's Community Development Foundation, 1975. Available from Black Women's Community Development Foundation, 1028 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 1010, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Nelson, Jill. "N-E-S-T-L-E-S Makes the Very Best?" *Seven Days,* Vol. 2, No. 7 (May 5, 1978). New York: Institute for New Communications, Inc., 1978.

Nonprint Media

Angry Not Mad. Videotape available from Urban Planning Aid, Media Project, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116. A videotape that discusses the controversy and politics of establishing separate units for so-called "violent" women and juveniles in Massachusetts, such units being separate from existing correctional facilities.

Bottle Babies. Film available from Boston INFACT, c/o Boston Industrial Mission, 56 Boylston Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138. A documentary on the epidemic infant deaths caused by faulty marketing of infant formula (primarily Nestle's products) in Third World countries.

Healthcaring from Our End of the Speculum. Film available from Women Make Movies, Inc., 257 West 19th Street, New York, New York 10011. Covers the politics of the women's health movement and the role of self-help and "well-woman care" in women's health clinics.

In the Best Interests of the Children. Film available from Iris Films, Box 5353, Berkeley, California 94705. Documentary about lesbian mothers and the issues and struggles surrounding child custody.

Janie's Janie. Film available from Odean Films, Box 315, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey 07417. Single white mother on welfare discusses raising her children alone and the value of collective and community action.

Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women. Recent film available from Cambridge Documentary Films, Inc., P.O. Box 385, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Important feminist look at a $40 billion industry.

Nursing: The Politics of Caring. Film available from Ilex Films, Box 226, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138.

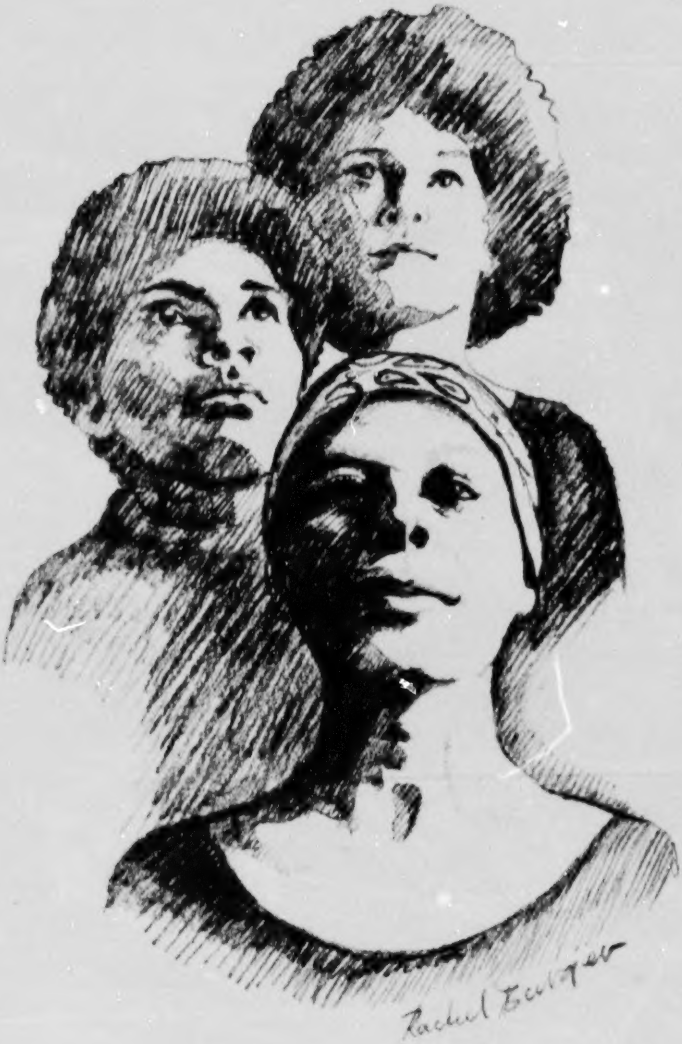
Self Help. Slide show available from Women's Community Health Center, 639 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Discusses basic self-examination and problems with present health care for women in the United States.

Song of the Canary: Industrial Illness in America. A recent film available from New Day Films, 660 York Street, San Francisco, California 94110. Documentary on current situation of occupational health hazards in the United States.

Sterilization Abuse. Slide show on sterilization abuse, available from the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA), P.O. Box 2727, Boston, Massachusetts 02208. In English and Spanish, a new and revised discussion of the issue of forced sterilization in the United States, of population-control programs in India and Latin America, and of the history of women's struggle for birth control and abortion.

Testimony. Film available from Amalgamated and Clothing Textile Workers Union, 150 Lincoln Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02111. J. P. Stevens workers describe their working conditions, especially the problem of brown lung disease. Explains why the boycott is important to the unionizing effort.

Working for Your Life. A recent film about the often-overlooked hazards faced by women on the job. For more information, write to Labor Occupational Health Program, Center for Labor Research and Education, Institute for Industrial Relations, 2521 Channing Way, Berkeley, California 94720.


Rachel Bulger

8. LATIN WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

Natalia Muiña

INTRODUCTION

The Latin American population in the United States grows larger each day.* With that growth comes an increase in social, economic, and political problems. The Latin population in the Northeast is concentrated primarily in large urban areas. New York, for example, contains fifty-seven percent of all Puerto Ricans in the United States; Boston and Springfield, Massachusetts, also have sizable communities.[1] Life in these large American cities is difficult for most immigrants, and it is no less difficult for the Latin immigrant who comes to this country aspiring to a better life. Although technically and legally Puerto Ricans are American citizens and so do not immigrate, I apply the word "immigrant" to Puerto Ricans, because culturally and ethnologically they are Latin Americans. It is only United States colonialism that has created the distinction.

In most Latin countries, children grow up with the idea that America is the richest country in the world. No one starves; life is easy and full of comforts; and anyone who has a little ambition and intelligence can climb up the social ladder and may even become rich. The fulfillment of this dream is true for only a very small percentage of immigrants. The lucky ones are usually the students—some from wealthy families, others who have scholarships. They come temporarily, to study in the large academic institutions, and then return to their homelands to hold good jobs that pay decent salaries. If they choose to remain in America, their high level of education helps them become more easily integrated into the American middle and sometimes upper classes. But children in Latin countries grow up amidst poverty, illiteracy, hunger, disease, political oppression, and unemployment. These realities do not change after immigration. Having little money, lacking education, and not speaking English, what is the reality they encounter?

First, housing is available only in the urban ghettos, where families share their living space with rats and cockroaches. They fear vandals and fires, and space and basic human services are sorely lacking. When searching for jobs,

Natalia Muiña *was born in Cuba and came to the United States as a child. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she is involved in a growing Latin women's movement, and where she has an active acupuncture practice.*

---

*When I say "Latin American," I am referring to the Latin population in the Northeast primarily composed of Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean Hispanics, plus Central and South Americans. This chapter does not deal with the experiences of Chicanas or women born in the United States of Latin parents; for these women, the issues and priorities are different.

[1] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Puerto Ricans in the United States: An Uncertain Future* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978).

Latins discover that, having few job or craft skills, they can find work only in factories and sweatshops or as domestics, where they struggle against poor pay and empty futures. Their children are enrolled in overcrowded schools in which drugs are abundant. Little effort is made to integrate the children into the learning process. Most often, the child who does not gain fluency in English skills is left back or placed in "slow" classes. The school environment creates emotional and psychological traumas that aggravate those already caused by changes in the cultural environment.

Culturally, the immigrant family feels severely deprived. American culture seems strange and difficult to understand. Morals appear lax (e.g., sexual promiscuity, disregard for elders), and the family structure does not seem so important. These attitudes serve greatly to isolate the Latin woman, for whom traditionally the family means everything. Despite the oppressive role that the traditional nuclear family structure sets up for women, it is within the family that the Latin woman feels at least a small sense of power and security. The family is the only place where she is allowed to make small decisions that may affect others' lives, especially her children's lives. Only in the role of family caretaker is she made to feel somewhat important and can she exercise some of her skills. Thus, she is lost, beyond the periphery of her neighborhood, in a world that is foreign geographically, culturally, and linguistically, in a world where she is considered a nonperson by virtue of being both Latin and female. Of course, the Latin woman's status is not entirely unpleasant to her man, who indirectly benefits from her predicament. By seemingly placing her on a pedestal as a saintly creature whose morals are irreproachable, he is securing for himself free, permanent maid service and is perpetuating the double standards so prevalent in Latin culture. A man's extramarital affairs, gambling excursions, or bouts of drunkenness are considered all right—*porqué él es macho!* (because he is a man)—yet similar behavior is inexcusable as indecent and not to be tolerated in a woman.

After a while, the family begins to undergo a transformation. The children who grow up in America, understanding, if sometimes poorly, the English language, begin to relate to and identify more with different aspects of American culture, such as consumerism, individualism, and lack of family closeness. Yet this same culture discriminates against their parents.

Little by little, a great vacuum begins to form between parents and children. The impact on the Latin woman can be devastating, and she may even lose the security of her traditional role within the family. And what of the children? Some become "Americanized." They forget their roots, forget their language, and lose their cultural traits. Through acculturation, such things get lost in the great human sea that is America, a country which equates being American with having material affluence and job stability. There are those who hold on to their traditions, their cultural characteristics. They have a harder time; they do not really belong to either an American or a Latin culture. Then there are those who, having lost their roots and culture, strive to find them again, to learn and live their heritage. For them the road is long and painful, as they realize how much their Americanization has taken away from them.

I have designed this workshop series from the perspective of a Latin feminist woman. The process of my politicalization is the process of an immigrant Latin woman's reaction to the conditions and images described above, which, I feel, have meaning to the women who daily face many problems because they are Latins in the United States.

Throughout this chapter, I make some general statements and references that I do not explain. It is my assumption that Latin women, for whom this was written, will clearly know what I mean by these terms.

GOALS

The main goal of "Latin Women in the United States" is to bring Latin women together to discuss their experiences with immigration and to seek solutions to some of the basic problems of their particular condition: being women of color in a country that discriminates against both their culture and their sex. The following questions form the basis for carrying out the dialogue.

- What happens to Latin women when they first come to the United States?
- How does the language barrier affect them?
- Do the economic realities of this country match their aspirations?
- What happens when they confront the shocking reality of being a minority discriminated against in the United States?
- How do they deal with the changes in morals, values, and culture?
- How do these changes affect the traditionally close-knit family structure?

ORGANIZING THE GROUPS

In Boston, a large concentration of Latin people live in the inner-city neighborhood of the South End. The South End has the most community organizations and human service agencies of the three local areas that contain large Hispanic populations. There is greater availability of information and services to the community at large, more leadership, and more involvement in programs such as English as a Second Language courses and cultural programs such as *Teatro Virazon*, a Latin theatre troupe that validates and affirms our culture. Yet the idea of developing a series of workshops for Latin women was not initially designed as part of our grant. This points to the neglect and lack of services suffered by the Latin community and by Latin women in particular. Even this program, designed by politically conscious feminists to reach low-income and minority women in a city that has a substantial number of Spanish-speaking residents, did not have a component geared specifically to Spanish-speaking women. Only after I was hired to carry out a more administrative kind of job was the idea of a workshop series for Latin women conceived.

The first workshop series was to focus on health, drawing on the experiences of my present profession as an acupuncture practitioner. The other series was to focus on Latin women's experiences in the United States. It drew on my deeper and more personal experience of having emigrated from Cuba at the age of eight.

At the time I was developing the workshop series I met my co-leader, a Latin woman who has a long history of organizing and community work. I found it good to work with a co-leader; besides doubling the resources and areas of expertise, the team approach provided support to keep us going when we felt demoralized or confused about what direction to take next.

Our goal was to reach the most isolated strata of the Latin women's community—the mothers receiving welfare, the ones who did not speak English, the low-income, poorly educated women who would not ordinarily have access to a workshop series taught in Spanish by Hispanic women, from a feminist perspective. We believed the woman most in need of information probably had little contact with any agency and spent most of her time at home or in the factory. Such women are so isolated from the mainstream of American culture that they have no knowledge of what agencies exist or how they can receive help.

One of the first decisions we made was not to hold the workshop series in any established agency in the South End. Instead we chose to use a lot of publicity to recruit women to a local center. Given the fact that workshops for Latin women seemed to be unprecedented in this area, we wanted a large cross section of women, not just those already using Hispanic agencies, to benefit from our workshop series.

We felt we did an excellent job of announcing our workshop series. We printed and distributed leaflets, put ads in community newspapers, advertised through local Hispanic radio stations, and even got an interview on a Spanish-speaking television show. We waited for results, convinced that such a broad publicity campaign just needed time to work—and ended up wasting precious time and becoming demoralized. When it became clear that our efforts would not bring Latin women together, we searched for a Hispanic agency willing to sponsor our workshop series.

The agency chosen for our workshop series is both geographically and organizationally in the middle of the South End. It has the respect and confidence of the community and, more important for our purposes, was already offering classes. If an agency site offers classes such as a high school equivalency program, English as a Second Language, or vocational training, you can become part of the curriculum. Any established agency you use should have strong links with the community, so that the job of finding participants is relatively simple. Because of time constraints, we were able to hold only four sessions, each lasting forty-five minutes. Had we contacted the agency earlier, we would have been incorporated into the general curriculum, and our sessions would each have lasted longer and the entire series continued further.

Why were our outreach efforts so unsuccessful? When working with Latin and Third World communities, it helps greatly to be known in and familiar with those communities. If not, then give yourself a lot of time to become visible in and identified with the particular community. This is the golden rule for any community organizer.

Neither co-leader lived in or was well known in this particular neighborhood, which was to our disadvantage in establishing basic trust issues. Any Third World, low-income community, used to the lack of services and unfulfilled promises of bureaucrats and social workers, is naturally going to be distrustful of and unresponsive to any program being touted by strangers. Being the same color or speaking the same language does not build instant bonds of trust.

Poor communities, specifically poor women who are single heads of households, have a hard enough time dealing with basics—food, clothing, shelter—in short, staying alive. Programs concerned with educational, intellectual, and to a certain extent emotional goals are seen as superfluous luxuries. Women might want to be involved, but for the most part they cannot afford the sacrifice of choosing intellectual pursuits over basic survival activities.

These issues raise all kinds of questions that should be analyzed by anyone who is undertaking a similar project. For example:

- What is the impact on a low-income community when a project is begun and after a short time (probably just as it is building momentum) is ended?
- Does this help foster even more distrust?
- Is it realistic to expect significant long-term effects from a one-year community project?

Even though this project did not consciously address such issues, we were committed to beginning somewhere. This workshop is a contribution toward that effort. It provided many valuable lessons, including the realization of the need for an honest exploration of the situation of Latin and Third World communities.

A tremendous isolation exists across the country among Latin women who are working on women's issues. There is no strong movement of people committed to struggling for women's issues in the Spanish-speaking communities, either in this country or abroad. Thus, it is very difficult to organize Latin women. In addition, survival is often an overwhelming issue for Latin people in this country who daily face discrimination and lack of opportunities.

Finally, organizing Latin women is also difficult because the more politically liberal women in the Latin community are usually directly involved in the various Latin nationalist movements. Although these women rightly perceive the negative effects imperialism and capitalism have on their countries and peoples, the nationalist movements tend to sacrifice feminist issues in favor of the "more important" issue of national and political liberation. Unfortunately, many women unquestioningly follow that line, leaving women's concerns such as child care and reproductive rights to be dealt with "after the revolution" is achieved.

LEADING THE GROUPS

Site Staff

Once you have established where you will conduct your workshop series be sure to maintain a close communication with the agency, its directors, and its staff. Since these people probably already have contact with the women who will participate in your workshop series, talking to the staff between sessions will help you better understand individual needs. You will be better prepared to make any curricular changes necessary in particular situations, thus ensuring the success of the sessions. In all fairness, I should say that the need for agency involvement was something I learned by omission. Not until the sessions were over did I understand how much more dynamic they could have been had I established closer ties with staff. By involving staff and participants in a process of personal sharing, you may foster more trust and better understanding between community and agency.

Site Participants

Our first workshop drew nine women from four different Latin American countries. They had resided in the United States anywhere from one to ten years. The majority were single heads of households. They had from one to four children each. Most of them had only an eighth-grade education, two were high school graduates, and one had a B.A. The group members ranged in age from twenty to fifty years of age. Each person began by saying something about who she was and where she came from, then summarized her experience in the United States. We found that the women were shy and reluctant to speak, until one of the leaders gave a very frank and personal introduction, offering some examples of her immigration experience. The group then became very animated, as women recollected and spoke about their particular experiences with immigration.

Be sensitive to the needs of the participants, even if that means relinquishing a lesson plan, regardless of how exciting and necessary it seems. The role of the leader is to give guidance and make sure the discussion does not become an aimless complaint session. The emphasis in this workshop series is to give participants the power and confidence to explore, in a group setting, some painful and personal incidents in their lives. The leader should be ready to sacrifice her idea of curriculum when the needs and uncertainties of the participants require that she do so. She should support the ideas that all women have much to say, that their experiences should be heard, and that sharing can be a learning experience for other women.

The idea of touching on many points as they came up was graphically illustrated in the second session. The discussion turned to reproduction, and one participant put forth the notion that if a woman was raped, she could not become pregnant, because pregnancy could result only from orgasm. It was impressive to see how quickly this myth was laid to rest by the other participants, who, gently, but knowledgeably, using good examples, cleared up her misconceptions.

FINDING RESOURCES

As anyone who attempts a program such as ours will discover, there is a veritable desert of resources geared specifically to the needs of Latin women (or men for that matter). It is hard to express the frustration felt after examining catalogue after catalogue of books, movies, and slides about women's issues, only to come up with, at best, very little about or for Latin women.

Is it because Latin women are so isolated and demoralized that they are not writing about their experience? Or is it that racism is so institutionalized that no one sees the importance of publishing and distributing material for and about us? The answer probably has shades of both theories. This is why it is imperative that Latin women begin to organize, do research, write, and distribute our own materials, our own resources. It will be hard. We will not have big institutions backing us. Federal agencies will not be beating down our doors to offer financial assistance. But we will have the freedom to do it our way, the way that is most responsive to our needs and concerns.

CONTENT

"Latin Women in the United States" is designed as a ten-week workshop series, each session lasting from one to two hours, once a week. The emphasis is on discussion. Additional reading and writing of appropriate materials are used only if participants feel comfortable enough with their literary skills to use those forms of communication.

Session One: Introduction

The first session is a chance to get acquainted. If the leader is sensitive, the session will begin to establish an environment of trust and openness to form the basis for the workshop series' success. Even if solutions are not found for problems raised, expressing frustrations and establishing the similarities and commonalities of experience among women are at the core of helping women see beyond their personal situations, to the political reality of the institutionalized sexism and racism they must struggle with.

Some questions the leader can ask to set the tone and mark the direction of the session are:

- What did you do in your native country? What do you do here?
- Has the experience of acculturation been easy or hard for you?

230

- What are some of the factors making your experience easy or hard?
- What are some of the things you like the most about the United States? the least?
- What are some of the things you like the most about your native country? the least?
- What were your expectations about this country before you came?
- Have those expectations been met?
- How have they changed?

Session Two: Cultural Roots

This session concentrates on the past, the women's ancestors and the way they lived, and how participants lived in their countries of origin. Using photographs and mementos of family, friends, and themselves, each participant re-creates a little bit of her past and is encouraged to give a small presentation to accompany her picture or sets of pictures. This session can generate a lot of excitement, as everyone is interested in old pictures. If the participants come from various Latin countries, this is a good chance to compare styles, morals, values, and customs in each country, thus making this a valuable learning session as well.

Discussion can center on which of those values, mores, and traditions have been retained by each individual and how they have affected her life in the twentieth century. For example, the leader might begin a discussion on courtship and marriage in Latin countries. Participants can discuss what that process is like in their country of origin. They can discuss the expectations and obligations of society toward the woman, the role of the church, parental restrictions, and so on. The leader can then steer the discussion to how emigrating to the United States has changed those attitudes. It is always interesting to discuss whether or not women see this change as a positive or negative one.

Session Three: Economic Realities

The economic realities of being a Latin immigrant in the United States can be harsh. In 1975, 33 percent of all the Puerto Rican heads of households were women, compared with 12 percent of other United States families. By contrast, only 34 percent of Puerto Rican women were in the labor force in 1975, a considerably lower proportion than that of all Spanish-speaking women and women of all races (42 percent and 40 percent respectively). Only 7.3 percent of Spanish-speaking women workers were professional and technical workers, compared with 16.2 percent of other United States women. Of all Spanish-speaking women workers, 50.8 percent were clustered in the fields of service workers (including those who do private housework) and operatives (including transport workers), as opposed to 33.2 percent of all United States women. About 33 percent of persons of Puerto Rican origin had incomes below the poverty level ($2,724 for an unrelated individual and $5,500 for a family of four).[1] These percentages form the basis for discussion of the economic situation for Latin women in the United States.

Unemployment and powerlessness go hand in hand. Various role plays can help women to express their anger toward discrimination and exploitative practices. For example, you could role play a scene between landlord and Latin tenant, where the English-speaking landlord tries to evict the Spanish-speaking tenant. Afterward, discuss the alternatives or different ways to deal with negligent and discriminatory practices by landlords: a call to the health department, an organized tenants' strike, or a complaint to an affirmative action board or the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

---

[1] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Puerto Ricans in the United States: An Uncertain Future* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978).

Session Four: Morals and Values

What is it that makes us Latin? Our culture includes how we eat, how we treat guests in our home, our behavior toward people we have just met, our behavior toward elders, our collective behavior (such as in social gatherings) and the interrelationship between men and women (for example, men always open doors, women always offer and prepare coffee for visitors).

This session analyzes the intrinsic ways that people behave and how these behaviors are tied to culture. The differences are part of what makes the experience of a Latin woman living in the United States a difficult one. The intrinsic Latin cultural traits can be discussed and analyzed to see which are worth keeping for their more human quality and which are worth discarding for their part in the oppressive system that has kept Latin women "in their place."

- Discuss the different ways in which young Latin people and young people born in the United States might behave toward elders. Which system seems more humane?
- What sacrifices does the Latin way of relating to elders require of young people? of women?

Session Five: Discrimination

Latin women are in double jeopardy within the context of discrimination (Black Latin women are in triple jeopardy because of race, class and sex oppression). We encounter discrimination outside our homes in a culture dominated by white Anglo-Saxon males. Discrimination in jobs and housing is blatant. More poignantly, discrimination in education has a very direct and damaging effect on Latin children, who usually receive an incomplete and inferior education, which nullifies their chances to climb out of poverty. These children also grow up ashamed of their cultural differences, viewing them as the cause of their mistreatment and thus disdaining their Latin roots. Often, the ones who make it out of poverty are the ones who lose their accents, their Spanish surnames, or their Latin looks. This session also introduces discussion of the sexual discrimination inflicted on Latin women by American men and by their own Latin brothers.

Some question you might ask to begin a discussion on discrimination are:

- Name ways you feel discriminated against every day for being Latin.
- Do you think the men you know enjoy certain privileges that you, as a Latin woman, cannot have?
- What are some of those privileges?
- Are the men in your life (fathers, lovers, husbands, older brothers) in positions of authority over you? For example, do they tell you where you can or cannot go? how late you can stay out?
- If you attended school in the United States, what was that experience like? How did being Latin affect your school experiences?

Session Six: The Double Day

At this point in the workshop series it is important to provide a film, a slide show, or a speaker. By now, participants should have had many frank discussions, and an outside resource person or film can provide relief, without being distracting, from the intensity of interpersonal sharing. Further, using a medium such as a film to reinforce some of the ideas and feelings being expressed will help build a sense of solidarity beyond the group itself.

The film chosen for this session, *The Double Day,** portrays women who work during the day as servants and then go home at night to do housework and take care of the children. The protagonists talk about their experiences in several Latin American countries. It is a very moving documentary, so leave time for discussion.

Session Seven: The Politics of Health Care

This session covers a wide range of topics dealing with physical, mental, emotional, and sexual health. Latin communities in this country, along with other Third World communities, often receive the worst kind of health care available. Hampered by poverty and language barriers, Latin people, especially women and children, are forced to seek medical care at the emergency rooms of large urban hospitals. Misdiagnosis, overmedication, and unnecessary operations are common experiences and often prove fatal. Such instances do not even take into consideration the fact that these are the places where all the new "experimental" drugs are tested on Third World people, who are the guinea pigs for the rest of society.

The following questions begin discussion on this topic:

- How can we learn about the present system of health care?
- How does it operate?
- Which of our needs does it meet? Which does it not meet?
- How can we get the best services when we need them?

Session Eight: Preventive Medicine

This session has four sections, each potentially taking a lot of time to discuss. How deeply to delve into each is up to the leader and her knowledge of each topic.

A. *How the Body Works*
It is helpful to begin with a simple but precise outline of the different parts of the body, discussing the organs and their function. Make sure you first ask participants how much they know of bodily functions and where organs are located.

B. *Nutrition*
Eating has always been an important part of culture. Eating the same foods reinforces cultural similarities and the ways people think. If, for example, our ancestors have for generations eaten beans and rice, we will probably eat them too. However, some traditions are not necessarily the healthiest. Although discarding these habits may seem too radical, modifying them to improve on tradition is worthwhile. Caribbean people tend to use a lot of lard in their cooking, which accounts for the higher incidence of arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure, and heart disease among Latin people. Cooking the same foods in oil, without significantly altering the taste, can be included in a session in which the leader reviews the nutritional content of many traditional foods. Such a session can be fun; the leader and participants could bring tra-

---

*See Resources section of this chapter (p. 226) for bibliographic information about *The Double Day* and other materials recommended for the workshop series.

ditional dishes, and ways of cooking these dishes using unrefined products can be demonstrated.

C. *Exercise*

Ask the participants what they consider to be exercise and whether or not they feel exercise is necessary for health. Even if participants have no time for formal exercise, the importance of daily walking, to circulate the blood, can be stressed. Simple stretching exercises can be demonstrated, as can exercises to strengthen the muscles. If your budget allows, it is a wonderful idea to bring in a woman instructor who knows self-defense and who can teach participants techniques that can protect them, and in the practice, be good exercise.

D. *Home Remedies and Herbs*

Discussion of home healing methods can readily involve Latin women, because Latin Americans have a strong tradition of using home remedies and herbs to cure their ills. In many Latin American countries, because of poverty, a doctor is called only as a last resort, so that women have had to rely on their home brand of healing; as a result, some very practical and effective home remedies have been handed down from one generation to the next. The same goes for herbs, which are an integral part of home-remedy lore. As an example, I remember that my great-grandmother used to give me chamomile tea whenever I had an upset stomach and linden tea whenever I was too excited.

Session Nine: Reproductive Health

Identify topics to be discussed. Do a needs assessment and write the results on newsprint.

Ask questions to stimulate thought; for example: What do we know or want to know about our reproductive organs? about our reproductive health? By doing this, you will identify areas of interest. Furthermore, discussion of certain topics (abortion, sexual pleasure) will give you some information about the hardest issues to discuss—the issues about which participants are most ignorant or miseducated. Next, divide the session into several different parts. For example, start with a topic to which all women can relate, such as menstruation. You can begin with the past and ask participants about their experiences with the onset of their menstrual cycle.

- Did you know what was happening when you first got your period?
- How did you feel about it?
- Whom did you tell? How did they respond to you?
- What do we know about our periods? What happens in our bodies?

Questions to stimulate discussion on reproduction are:

- As a girl, how did you hear people refer to women's reproductive organs?
- How did their comments make you feel?
- How do we take care of our genital organs? our breasts?
- How do we know our reproductive organs are healthy?
- What are infections? What causes them? What are the symptoms?
- How can we treat them ourselves?

Give out information about yeast infections, bacterial infections, gonorrhea, and syphilis; fact sheets are available from neighborhood health clinics providing family planning.

Part of the session can be devoted to birth control. Discussion of abortion might be emotionally charged, so you must be very sensitive to ensure that all women give their views without hurting other women's feelings. More than likely, there will be two camps: pro and con. Questions for discussion are:

- How do you feel about birth control?
- What do you know about it?
- Has anyone here been sterilized? If so, what were the circumstances?
- How do you feel about abortion? Has anyone here had an abortion?

Give out information about different methods of birth control. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each one. Facts to keep in mind to open up discussion are as follows:

- Contraceptive pills were used in Puerto Rico for five years before they were brought to the United States.
- The pill is promoted as a method of birth control for use among Latin women in the United States. Discuss why.

Summarize topics that were discussed. Actively support the participants for having taken risks and given their views on topics which they may have felt uncomfortable discussing. Acknowledge women's strengths, and acknowledge the importance and seriousness of what the group is doing.

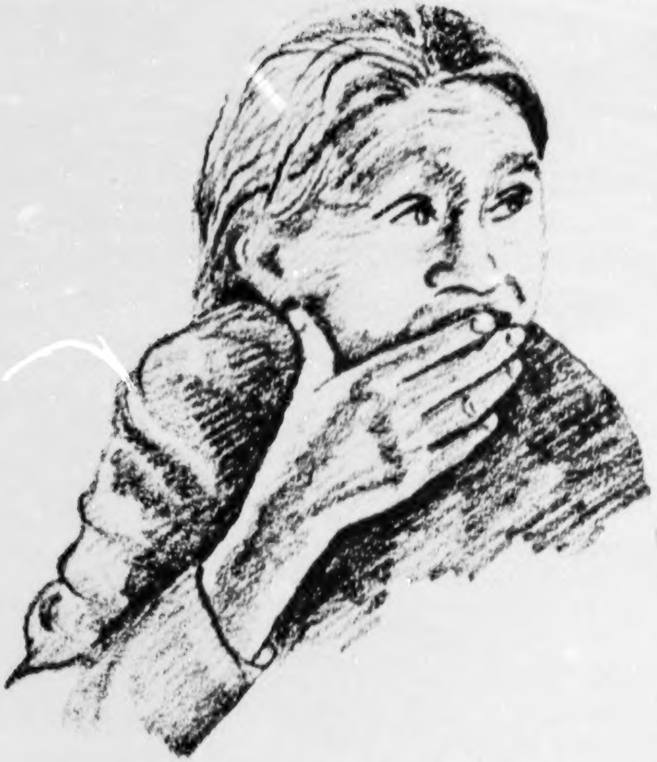
Session Ten: The Future

The future for Latin American people in this country and for women specifically holds a lot of questions. The best approach I felt this session could have was to ask a lot of questions about the participants so that together we could come up with some speculative conclusions.

Questions I asked included the following:

- How is growing up, and in some cases being born, in the United States affecting children's relationship to their Latin background? to their families?
- Is it important to preserve our culture?
- Which aspects of our culture should we keep? which should we throw out?
- How are we making sure that our children, even if they are more fluent in English and feel more American than Latin, preserve some of the positive aspects of Latin tradition and culture?
- What would it be like to emigrate back to our countries of origin in our old age?
- Would we want to?
- What is it like to grow old in the United States?
- Are Latin women who emigrate to the States willing to take a more independent and self-sustaining role than that which they have traditionally been given?
- What is the importance of that?

These questions will, I hope, be a good ending point for the participants. By discussing their collective future and the future of their children, they can gain more strength and clarity about their condition and their direction.



CONCLUSION

Problems facing the Latin woman today are enormous. She must overcome discrimination on many fronts. She must also overcome her own sense of helplessness and lack of worth. In short, she must learn to love herself—not because she is someone's woman, not because she is someone's mother, but because she is a woman. Out of this self-love comes a very necessary strength and clarity of purpose; however, she has a long way to go to achieve this goal. I hope this project has added a small grain of sand to that process. It has not addressed all the issues, has not resolved the tensions, has not liberated women from their oppression. It *has* started a dialogue—a dialogue that will be the catalyst for the Latin woman's liberation, and a dialogue that must continue and grow until her voice is heard, her value recognized, her needs met.

Perhaps the most important lesson I have learned from this project is that the impetus for this dialogue must come from within the Latin women's community and not from outside it. We have to gain control over our own growing process. This means that we must research, design, and implement any program geared toward Latin women's issues in order to gain a response from the Latin women's community. Well-intentioned, "maternalistic" efforts by the white feminist movement can be helpful but ultimately will not do. Too many times, Latin women have been used as research material. Too many times, groups and institutions that previously had no ties at all to the Latin community have received, through their privileged position, money to implement programs for Latin women. In reality, such programs do nothing for Latin women, because ignorance of Latin issues, needs, and language prevents any real communication between program and community. The benefits accrue only to the organization or institution in question, which gains status and reputation as an advocate for Latin people. These groups, then, get re-funded more easily, making it harder for grass-roots Latin community organizers to be funded for the same purposes.

Who can understand the problems of Latin women as well as other Latin women? Who can be as sensitive to Latin cultural traits and respectful of Latin traditions as Latin women? In ending, I want to exhort Latin women—those with enough privileges and resources to be reading this chapter—to start breaking the chains of isolation and to cut across the silence and invisibility that we have endured for so long. Look around you. There must be other Latin women like yourself who do not like being oppressed, who do not want to be discriminated against, and who need to share with other Latin women their struggles, as well as their histories. We must begin to organize in our communities, to take control over our destinies. We have to learn to demand what we need—decent housing, adequate health care, equal education, the preservation of our culture—and to reject what we know is not good for us—forced sterilization, discrimination in any form, and the deliberate or unconscious erosion of the positive and important aspects of our culture. Such efforts require a lot of analyzing, defining, listening, struggling—but they must be begun.

Finally, I conclude with the hope that racism is not so rampant that funding sources in the public and private sectors will not awaken to the fact that the money and control over projects and programs for Latin people must be placed with Latins. Latin women are beginning to organize, to work together, and to develop programs for ourselves, with or without money. We are many, we are growing in number and in strength, and we will be a force to contend with.

RESOURCES

Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women.* Second Edition. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976. Free copies are available to low-income women. Write to Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Box 192, Somerville, Massachusetts 02144. Spanish translation of text, *Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas,* is also available.

Casals, Lourdes. *Cubans in the USA: A Survey of the Literature.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Center for Latin American Studies, 1975, pp. 25–51.

Chicana Rights Project. *CETA: An Economic Tool for Women.* San Francisco: Chicana Rights Project, 1977. Available from Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, 28 Geary Street, San Francisco, California 94108.

Cohen, Lucy M. "The Female Factor in Resettlement." *Society-Social Sciences and Modern Society* (September/October 1977), pp. 27–30. Available from Transaction Periodical Consortium, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903.

Cota-Robles Suarez, Cecilia. "Sexual Stereotypes: Psychological and Cultural Survival," *Regenerazion,* Vol. 2, No. 3 (1973), pp 17–21. Available from Women's Multicultural Resources Project, Information System Development, 1100 East 8th Street, Austin, Texas 78702.

The Double Day (film). 53 minutes. New York: Unifilm, 1975. Available from Unifilm, 419 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016.

Infante, Isa Maria. "Politicization of Immigrant Women from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic." Thesis, University of California, Riverside, 1977.

La Voz, *The Hispanic Woman in America.* Denver: La Voz Publications, 1977. Available by writing to La Voz, P.O. Box 9650, Denver, Colorado 80209.

Saavreda-Vela, Pilar. "Hispanic Women in Double Jeopardy." *Agenda* (November/December 1977). Available from the National Council on La Raza, 1725 1 Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20006.

Salinas, Judy. *The Chicana Image.* Reprint, 1975. Available from Popular Culture Association, Popular Culture Center, University of Bowling Green, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403.

Sanchez, Rosaura, and Rosa Martinez Cruz, eds. *Essays on* La Mujer. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977. A Chicano Studies Center Publication, Anthology #1. Of special note is the chapter by Evelna Marquez and Margarita Rimirez, "Women's Task Is to Gain Liberation."

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. *Puerto Ricans in the United States: An Uncertain Future.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978.

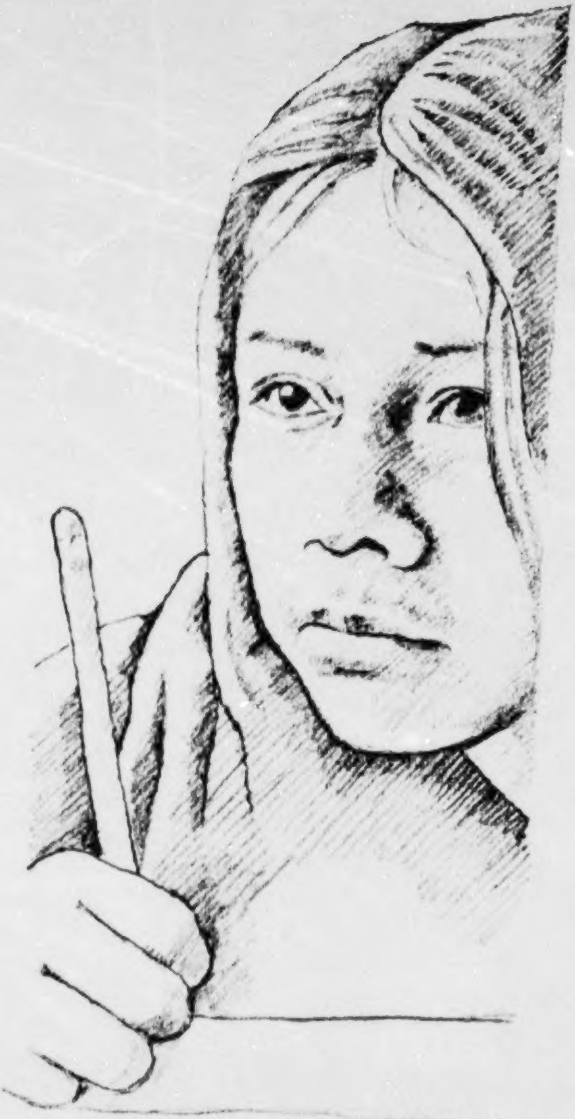
____________. "Sexism and Racism: A Feminist Perspective." *Civil Rights Digest.* Washington, D.C.: Commission on Civil Rights, 1974.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. "Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States." *Current Population Report,* Population Characteristics Series, p-20, No. 328, 1978.

U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. *Women of Puerto Rican Origin in the United States.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1977.

Varisco de Garcia, Norma. "Education and the Spanish Speaking Woman." *Journal of the National Association for Bilingual Education* (May 1976), pp. 55–60.

Vivo, Paqita. *The Puerto Ricans: An Annotated Bibliography.* New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1973.


Rachel Bu-ja-

9. WOMEN AND WRITING

Fahamisha Shariat

INTRODUCTION

Writing is many things. It is first a means of communication. Additionally, it is a means of self-expression. But writing can be more than these. Writing can be a means of self-discovery, a means of empowerment, and a tool for change. The design for this workshop on women and writing encompassed all of these possibilities. From the beginning, the emphasis was not on a writing class, with its focus on rules and regulations, nor was it on a literature class, with its focus on interpreting and evaluating selected "works of literature." Rather, the workshop series was viewed as a means of exploration into the act and process of writing by women, particularly Black women. The emphasis was on the discovery of possibilities and options, as well as the discovery of women's achievements. Reading writings by women provides an exploration into hidden territory: the world of women, a world that is often dismissed as trivial, as uninteresting, a world that women themselves might believe is unimportant.

Many people become turned off by the written word early in their lives. The attitude is particularly prevalent among the poor, among racial and ethnic minorities, and among women. Too, "great works of literature" seem to be written by and for white men only. A look at any high school or college literature textbook reveals that most selections are written by men (American and British or other Western European male writers). In addition, the greatness of these works seems directly related to the need for an instructor—for an "interpreter" who is to make these writings understood or appreciated. Because women, racial and ethnic minorities, and the poor do not find their realities reflected in this "literature," often they do not relate writing to themselves or see the act of writing as a possibility in their own lives.

Reading to obtain information, to broaden the base of one's experiences, to gain insights, to explore the self, to develop opinions, and to obtain pleasure are not the goals presented in many classes. Writing to communicate ideas and feelings, to share experiences, to validate or express oneself, to enlist support for a point of view, or to create something beautiful and/or powerful are seldom the focal points of composition classes. Traditionally structured courses serve to remove people from the power and value of reading and writing.

Historically, writing has been a means of maintaining class distinctions: the elite are literate. Today, literacy for the masses is being redefined as "being able to read and fill out job and credit applications."

Too often, writing is perceived as something only a chosen few can do; serious reading is understood as something that requires training. Thus, popular attitudes toward reading and writing reinforce class distinctions and racial stereotypes. "Where is your Black or female Shakespeare?" asks the racist, sexist standardbearer of what is and what is not "good" literature and writing. "Let us do the defining," we reply.

Fahamisha Shariat *(born Patricia I. Brown) is a blackwoman/teacher/lecturer/performing artist/writer who lives in Roxbury, Massachusetts.*

240

Definition, then, is the focus for the workshop series on women and writing. During the sessions, participants read writings by women that provide another vision of the major events and issues confronting human beings past and present, and that therefore provide new ways of perceiving the future. To examine the linkages between apartheid and violence against women in the United States, as June Jordan does in "Poem about My Rights,"[1] is to see racial and sexual oppression in a new way. Through such writings, participants can share experiences with other women and can often transcend barriers of time, distance, ethnicity, race, and class. In such sharing, women begin to reach out and exchange ideas which can reinforce, modify, or completely change their beliefs.

During the workshop series, women write on the basis of their own needs and experiences and discuss their writing and the uses of writing in general. They find that writing forces them to organize their ideas and feelings into a form that can be understood by others. They find that writing also provides a means of recording their experiences and existence and thus becomes an effective tool for defining and controlling their realities.

The workshop series were cooperatively led by two working writers. At the time of the workshops one was actively involved in developing scripts for a women's theatre company, writing book reviews, and editing a magazine. The other, a former public relations and advertising writer, was writing the scripts for a weekly public affairs radio program. She is also a former instructor of literature and writing. Both are sporadic journal keepers, and both are Black women interested and involved in Black women's cultural expression. Their interests and skills helped shape the group experience.

GOALS

This workshop series is not designed to teach the basic literacy skills. It is not concerned, except insofar as they relate to more specific goals, with questions of usage and syntax. "Women and Writing" seeks to provide women with examples of other women for whom the act of writing has been a positive and creative, even liberating, activity that is not only "artistic," but functional—having some use or purpose.

For the group leader who is concerned about raising the reading and writing skills of participants, remember—everyone who wants to read and write can. Although this is an obvious truism, it is not necessarily believed by all teachers. The most effective adult literacy program is one that allows a great deal of one-to-one contact, and a group may not be the best means of furthering reading and writing skills development. However, offering a workshop series on "Women and Writing" can be an excellent way to reinforce a skills-development program.

Goals for the particular workshop series described in this chapter fell into two categories, the general and the specific:

- The first general goal was to introduce participants to a wide range of women writers, known and unknown, covering a wide variety of styles, approaches, and purposes. Because so few of the works of women writers are taught in general English and literature classes, it is highly unlikely that many people, particularly if they have been out of school for more than five years, have much familiarity with women's writings. For many women, just discovering the num-

---

[1] June Jordan, "Poem about My Rights," *Essence*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

241

ber and range of women writers is a self-affirming activity. "I did not know that anyone wrote about things like this" was a common response to many of the readings.

- The second general goal was to encourage participants to feel comfortable about writing. At times, the examples of the women writers whose works were read in the sessions served as a stimulus for the participants to follow and begin their own writing. Because in this setting a participant's writings are examined as closely as published writings are, the workshop writer has an opportunity to see her ideas, opinions, and experiences taken seriously by others. Because her work is respected as being important, the participant can recognize the validity of seeing herself as a writer.
- The third general goal was to present writing as a purposeful act: expressing oneself, recording one's experiences, and/or persuading others to one's point of view.
- More specifically, we as Black women—the co-leaders of these groups—wanted to introduce the participants to a spectrum of Black women writers as a means of exploring Black women's experiences. Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* tells more of the Black woman's experience of slavery than one can hope to find in Alex Haley's *Roots.*[1] Reading writings by Black women, too, provided an opportunity to explore issues of racism as well as sexism in American society. (Similarly, the readings could be selected from another racial or ethnic group or could possibly be based on a specific issue or range of issues.)
- Another specific goal was to provide a supportive environment in which participants might develop their writing interests and skills in a noncompetitive setting. Without the worry of being graded, the workshop writer was free to concentrate on communication. It was hoped that participants would find writing an outlet for their creativity and would share their experiences, feelings, and ideas with other group members. However, writing is a very personal activity. Sharing a piece of writing involves sharing a part of the self. In the beginning sessions, particularly if the first writings are journal entries, participants may be unwilling to read their works aloud. In some instances, the distance achieved between the writer and the work by having the material copied for class distribution is sufficient to make the writer feel comfortable about having her work discussed. At other times, a writer may ask the leader to read the work aloud. In any case, all writer participants should be encouraged to present their own materials.

ORGANIZING THE GROUPS

"Women and Writing" was offered at two sites: (a) a residential program for formerly drug-dependent women and their children and (b) a community cultural and educational center. The residential program, having been involved in a similar workshop series in the past,[2] requested inclusion in the current project. The community center, on the other hand, was chosen because it provided a setting accessible to Black women throughout the Greater Boston area; it was near public transportation, offered parking space, and provided night-time security.

---

[1] Margaret Walker, *Jubilee* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966); and Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday and Co., 1976).

[2] See Deborah Pearlman et al., *Breaking the Silence: Seven Courses in Women's Studies* (Newton, Massachusetts: Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center, 1979).

During the workshop series given at the residential center, there were usually about nine women residents, all of whom attended the sessions. Two counselors occasionally attended as well. The group usually comprised five or six Black women and three or four white women. The residents varied in age from twenty years and older and were all in the beginning stages of their treatment programs at the center.

Approximately nine women participated in the workshop series at the community center. They came from all over the Boston area and from a wide variety of backgrounds. Ranging in age from their early twenties to early thirties, they included a street youth worker and poet, a leathercraftswoman and office worker, a newswriter and creative writer, a student and dancer, a court psychologist, a court youth worker, and a singer.

At the community center, "Women and Writing" was team-taught simultaneously with "Black Women's Culture." Most of the women who participated in both courses had a primary interest in Black women's culture. Writings by Black women were thus used both as examples/descriptions of cultural expression and as materials for exploration into women and writing. The discussions of different aspects of Black women's culture often overlapped a discussion of a particular writing by a Black woman.

Interest level in the topic of women and writing varied among the residents of the drug program, but attendance was compulsory. Most of the women stated a lack of interest or enthusiasm for reading and writing, but they had to participate in the workshop series as part of their treatment plan. This compulsory regulation, coupled with the resulting lack of enthusiasm/interest, remained a problem. The relationship between the workshop series and the rest of the residents' treatment program generated another problem. The staff seemed to be looking to the workshop series to provide some definite needs that were never articulated, except by a call for more "discipline" and more "structure." (The closest thing to a specific request was the staff's preference for the workshop series to be conducted with the participants seated around a large table in a conference- or meeting-type space, rather than seated around the living room, which had a sofa and chairs. The staff also requested being given a regular schedule of writing assignments.) Because one of the workshop's emphases was on process/discovery, the workshop series had a difficult time meshing with the treatment center's more rigidly structured program.

As a group leader, you should have a very clear understanding with the staff regarding the nature and goals of the workshop series. Make sure that some consensus is reached. You should also encourage the staff to participate in, not just observe, the workshop series. They will then have a clearer idea of the group experience.

Because attendance at the community center was voluntary, it was more erratic. However, fluctuating attendance was offset by the interest and enthusiasm of the particular group of women who came on a given evening. Although no attempt was made to get every participant to write, those women who were writing were encouraged to share their work with the group and usually did so in the context of a discussion.

There were also great differences in outreach efforts between the residential center and the community center. No outreach program was necessary at the residential center. By contrast, a number of recruitment methods were used at the community center. Flyers were mailed and distributed at sites and at events frequented by Black women. Public service announcements were sent to Black and women-oriented radio and television programs. Posters were put up at community centers and institutions. Group leaders also contacted women they knew and asked them to inform other women about the course. It became obvious that large numbers of women knew about the workshop series when, several months later, women were still asking about it.

The workshop sessions were held during a period when there had been a series of murders, rapes, and attacks against women in the Boston area. Concern for community safety was high. Some women voiced a reluctance to attend evening courses of any kind, no matter how high their interest in the subject matter. The community center provided an escort service to public transportation, and women with cars provided rides for those without. But for women who did not feel safe on the particular street where the center was located, there was no solution.

THE GROUP PROCESS

Although both groups were composed of women of similar ages, there were significant differences. One of the most important was the difference in expectations.

The women in the residential center were a multi-racial, multi-ethnic group whose basic shared experience was former dependence on drugs or alcohol. Because attendance was compulsory, the group had no fixed expectations for the workshop series, and at times there was a good deal of passive resistance to the sessions. A resident might wander in and out of the session or sit physically apart from the rest of the group; or she simply might not participate in discussions, perhaps giving the excuse that she had not had time to read, or saying that none of the selections had interested her. Reactions of this sort made those residents who were interested hesitant to express themselves. In addition, the dynamics were often affected by what had been happening in the center during a given period. Several times the series was interrupted by sessions cancelled because of problems at the center. Because the leaders were outside of the situation, it was often difficult in presenting the course to make the necessary connections between the readings and the events in these women's lives.

By contrast, the community center group was composed of Black women who had an interest in sharing their experiences and ideas with other Black women. They expected the course to be a positive experience.

Nonetheless, most of the women in both groups were challenged at least a few times to consider ideas or experiences in new ways. Because the readings covered a broad spectrum of experiences and political/social viewpoints, participants were encouraged to voice their own experiences and opinions. The combination of readings and discussions provided an occasion for gaining insights into other ways of perceiving the world.

LEADING THE GROUPS

The workshop series was designed to be given in twelve one- to two-hour sessions, to groups meeting once a week. The basic format for each session was the same: reading, writing, and discussion. Emphasis was on making connections—between the reading selection and the self, between the reading and the group experience, between different readings, between the readings and the act of writing, between a participant's writing and the group experience. In defining the relationship between the reading selection and the self, there were no "wrong" answers. The procedure was to ask questions of the text: What does it say to me (or what am I trying to say)? What is my response to the reading? Do others understand from my writing what I intended to say?

The treatment center residents were assigned weekly writings; the community center group could write if they wished to do so. Both groups were given at least one short reading selection per week. Often during sessions very short pieces were read aloud for discussion. This procedure allowed participants who had limited reading skills to share more fully in the experience.

Both groups were much more involved with the experiences and/or ideas being discussed in the readings than they were with the written work itself or the act/process of writing. Thus the discussions most often were less about writing as such, than about women's experiences and options. However, a recognition of the power of writing to engage people in dialogue and/or action developed over the course of the workshop series.

In both groups, most of the women were introduced to writers whose works they had not read. (In many instances, participants had never heard of the writers.) Some participants independently sought additional works by an author they were introduced to through the workshop series.

Reading works by women thus became the stimulus for discussion, for discovery and learning, and for further action: reading more or writing. The workshop series became a setting in which learning was self-motivated on the basis of the participants' own goals and experiences rather than those of someone else.

THE JOURNAL

Keeping a journal can be a key activity in a workshop series on women and writing. It revives an old literary form once used by most literate people, women and men, that has been virtually abandoned with the advent of telephones, television, and other technological inventions. Historically, one of the major sources of information for women's perception of reality has been journals kept by women—both "famous" and "ordinary."

The journal can be many things: a record of a woman's day-to-day activities, a list of tasks to be done and a record of their completion, a space to copy short writings which touch her mind or heart in some special way, a space to comment on what's happening around her, or a place for a dialogue with herself. If the decision is made to use journal writing as the primary means of involving participants in writing, it goes without saying that you as the leader must also develop the habit of journal writing.

Encourage women to use their journals for shopping lists, for "things-I-have-to-do" lists, for telephone messages, and for copying passages. Sometimes impatience with the act of writing is an obstacle to a person newly acquiring the writing habit. Using the journal for lists of things to do can be a helpful starting point toward more involved journal writing. A list can be a good clue to unraveling the mysteries of how a person sets priorities, follows through, allots time, and more.

For the woman who has trouble finding a topic, writing under the influence of strong feelings may be the answer; for example, she might use the journal as the place for composing those letters she knows she'll never send—as a way of venting emotion. Or the journal can be a place for copying writings normally underlined in a book or clipped from a magazine or newspaper. Whatever the journal's use, the goal is to make writing a habitual activity.

Maintaining a group journal is a good way to interest participants in the journal-keeping process. Allot some time at the end of each session to reflect on what has taken place. Have the group summarize what has happened. Ask each person to contribute what she perceives as having been the highlight of the session. Ask for comments and evaluations of the session. Each week ask a different person to be responsible for making the session's journal entry; let participants add personal comments to the group entry, if they wish.

In addition to encouraging introspection, the group journal can become a record of the workshop series. The group journal can also serve to break down women's inhibitions about sharing their own journal entries. In the process of group composition, participants share in the creative process and become less shy with one another.

The group journal can also be used to set an agenda when a session has a number of activities scheduled. Composing the end-of-session entry then affords an opportunity for the group to see how well they have fulfilled their objectives. Notes for the next session can form the final part of the group entry, which then becomes especially important if time limitations have forced a discussion to end in midstream or a topic to be postponed.

The group journal can be the only writing project of the group, or it can be one of many projects, used with the individual journal and other writing assignments. Keep your options open.

CONTENT

Following is a broad outline of the workshop series, organized by session. With the exception of the introductory session, each follows the same discussion format. The composition of the group, as well as what is happening in the local community, will shape the nature of the discussion and influence the choice of reading assignments. You as the group leader will have the responsibility of finding readings that are exciting and stimulating to you as well as to the group members.

Because of the increase in acts of violence against women in the Boston area during the workshop series, violence against women, in particular Black women (twelve Black women had been murdered within a very short time), became a major topic of discussion and writing. This issue led women to discussions of the ways women perceive themselves, the ways women sometimes cooperate in their oppression because of negative self-images and underestimated capabilities, the ways in which women resist oppression, and the ways women can unite in struggle. In another place and time, the issues probably would have been different.

For each session, the goals are the same: reading and writing for the discovery of self, of other women, and of external conditions affecting women.

Session One

This session is primarily an introductory and get-acquainted session. As the group leader, you should try to elicit information on the participants' backgrounds and interests as a guide to possible reading selections. You should be prepared to introduce yourself in a way that will indicate to participants what you would like to know about them. You should also explain this workshop series' goals and format. A possible discussion might include the following: What writers do participants know and like? How do participants feel about reading and writing? What kinds of experiences have shaped their feelings about reading and writing? What are their expectations? Is there something they want to see happen as a result of the session? This session should also introduce the plan for each participant to keep a journal.

Session Two

This session establishes the workshop format. You, or a participant, might read one or two short selections such as a journal entry, a poem, or an excerpt from a longer story or essay. The selection should be short enough to be absorbed in one or two readings. Try to get each participant to respond to the reading. What does it make her think of? How does it make her feel? Can she identify with what is being discussed? Does she like it? Why or why not? Encourage everyone to be specific in her comments and to respond to one another as well as to the text. If participants have begun their journals, try to get someone to share something from her journal. Explore: Why did she write? What conditions prompted the writing? What was the effect on her? What is the effect on the group hearing the selection?

If longer works are going to be read, distribute them before the session in which they will be discussed. Give people time to read and think about them. If you are making writing assignments, you might ask participants to write a response to the reading selection. Another possible writing assignment is to respond to the session itself. Still another is to write something that is similar to the reading selection.

Session Three

This follows the same format as Session Two. Try to ensure that every woman has an opportunity to express her ideas and feelings about the readings and the discussion. Encourage exchange and dialogue. By this time, the more articulate members of the group will have identified themselves. If you have been tape-recording your sessions, you may want to transcribe some of the more provocative or colorful statements for discussion. Check to see what or if people are writing in their journals. If you are keeping a group journal, compose the entry for the first sessions (see p. 234). This activity gives you an opportunity to review what has happened and to institute a regular evaluation process. Distribute the readings for the next session.

Sessions Four, Five, and Six

If you are organizing your reading selections and sessions thematically, a good starting point is the theme of "Writing for Self-Discovery." The emphasis is on writing as a means of exploring the inner and outer self, and readings can be selected from appropriate journals (published and unpublished), letters, and autobiographies. Find out if anyone already keeps a diary or journal or has a woman friend or relative who has kept one. Discuss why women keep journals. From a historical perspective, you might want to introduce the ways in which easy access to the telephone may have affected the habit of journal keeping, which was a common practice in earlier centuries. Discussion might also focus on how writing can put a person in tune with herself: her own feelings, attitudes, and reactions. You might want to discuss why a person writes an autobiography. (Try to use some autobiographical selections by lesser-known women. Women need to understand the importance of all women's experiences, not just those of the "famous.") This is a good time to introduce the use of a tape recorder for interviewing oneself and others. Find out if anyone has ever just talked into a tape recorder and played it back. Possible writing assignments during this series of sessions might include an autobiographical sketch; an interview with or a description of another participant or a family member; or a narrative about a memorable personal experience. In each case, the goal is to encourage the writer to express personal responses and feelings about the situation or person.

Sessions Seven, Eight, and Nine

These sessions move from self-discovery to self-expression and self-revelation. Emphasis is on projecting the participant's self and her experiences. In this case, participants are reading to find out what happens, how, and why; they are writing to tell a story. Readings should be selected to illustrate different ways of telling a story—for example, a straight news article, a historical narrative, a short story, a narrative poem, or an incident in a novel. Biography and autobiography as narratives can also be used during these sessions. Discussion focuses on such topics as what happens, how we come to know what happens, and how we are influenced to respond because of the way in which the story is told. Different ways of organizing detail, different uses of dialogue and dialect, and different ways in which characters are presented are other aspects to be examined during these sessions.

Possible writing assignments might include recounting the following: a typical day, a remembrance of a vivid school or job experience, an incident with a child, a story told by an older relative, an encounter with a bureaucracy, or an encounter with racial or sexual bias. Other possible topics are: how I met my best friend or mate, my first job, or the first time I felt like a grown woman.

The particulars of a reading selection will, obviously, generate most of your discussion. For example, when one group was reading a selection from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,[1] the discussion focused on the ways in which mothers and grandmothers attempt to have their daughters and granddaughters live out unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. The group also discussed the problems of women who try to live out roles defined by others; adolescent expectations of marriage; wife battering; and more. This type of free-association discussion is common in a course on women and writing.

Sessions Ten, Eleven, and Twelve

The last sessions can be a time to concentrate on writing as an instrument of change and the effects writings can have on a person's ideas and/or actions. Readings in analysis and criticism—in poetry and essay form—might be used to illustrate different approaches to persuasive writing.

Try to define the writer's position on a particular issue, and focus discussions on the participants' responses to the writer's position and the resulting group dialogue. The use of different forms of writing provides an opportunity to examine the many ways in which a writer can use words to express an opinion or to advocate action.

The formal essay "The Media Image of Black Women"[2] and the personal and humorous approach of "Black Satin Amazon Fire Engine Cry Baby: Meditation on a Myth"[3] both deal with the issues of the myths and stereotypes about Black women. However, the first uses analysis and compilation of data and the second uses personal experience to make their points. Again, the "Poem about My Rights"[1] addresses some of the same issues of women's safety raised in the "Black Satin. . ." article.

---

[1] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978).

[2] Jean Carey Bond, "The Media Image of Black Women," *Freedomways*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1975).

[3] Verta Mae Grosvenor, "Black Satin Amazon Fire Engine Cry Baby: Meditation on a Myth," *Village Voice*, May 28, 1979.

Readings for these sessions should be selected on the basis of their ability to provoke discussion—even argument. You should encourage participants to take a position on the issue under discussion, which they can then define and defend in writing.

Writing assignments during the final sessions could include a critical evaluation of a reading, a television program, or a film; you should stress the validity of the writer's response to a given work. Another writing assignment could be a letter to the editor of the local newspaper about an issue of concern to the participant(s). Still another possibility is a position paper on an issue about which a participant has strong feelings. It may be necessary to introduce some basic research techniques—how to find supporting evidence for a position, use of factual and statistical data—during one or more of these sessions. If you or the participants have access to an editorial writer, an investigative reporter, or someone with a similar writing job, you could invite such a woman to a session.

DISCUSSION

The workshop series' content and session formats as outlined here are deliberately flexible. In effect, the choice of readings and themes will shape the structure and the number of sessions to be devoted to the different aspects of women and writing. The interests and skills of the group leader and of the participants will play an equally important part in shaping sessions.

The selection of workshop readings plays a major part in presenting "Women and Writing." At first you will have to select the readings alone; later the participants may have suggestions. It is important that you be prepared to read widely in current journals, newspapers, and magazines, as well as in books—poetry, fiction, biography, autobiography, essays—by women. Try to discover what magazines are read regularly by the participants, and ask them to look for readings to share. You might want to develop a recommended readings list based on participants' recommendations.

If you have access to the manuscripts of practicing women writers, you may wish to use these for insight into the writing process. If you can get several versions of the same piece of writing, they will serve as excellent leads into the craft of writing. Make sure you have access to copying equipment. Whenever possible, everyone should have a copy of what is being discussed. If a participant reads aloud from her writing one week and it receives a good deal of response, try to have her selection copied for general distribution.

A list of readings used in our workshop series, along with a resource list, follows. The order in which these selections are listed is not necessarily the order in which they were used, and not all selections were used in both settings.

In general, book-length readings are not recommended. Differences in reading speeds, time available for reading, and other variables, create difficulty in working a book into the schedule. If you want to include a novel among your readings, assign it early and schedule your discussion for late in the series.

The readings used for these two workshop series were selected on the basis of (a) their potential for raising issues for discussion and (b) their relevance to topics, issues, or techniques raised in previous sessions. In your selection of readings, you should also consider such things as length (shorter pieces can be read aloud during a session and squeezed into busy schedules more easily) and readability (steer clear of highly technical or academic writings that reek of jargon). In addition, give participants a chance to read over the selections prior to the session in which you will be discussing them. Be prepared to ask questions about the readings, to probe for responses, and to point out your own understanding of and reactions to each reading's subject and style, particularly in the early sessions. Once your group has begun to feel comfortable about the discussion format, participants may carry much more of the weight. However, it is essential that you have something to say about the readings if you expect the rest of the group to enter into any kind of discussion.

---

[1] June Jordan, "Poem about My Rights," *Essence*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

Do not overlook current periodicals (including mass-market publications) as sources for thought-provoking women's writings. Several of the pieces listed in this chapter are from the manuscripts of working writers; selection of such readings gives participants insight into the writing process and can be particularly helpful if the writer herself is available for discussion or if several drafts of the same piece are available for comparison and study.

RESOURCES

READINGS USED

Following are some of the selections read during the two workshop series.

Bond, Jean Carey. "The Media Image of Black Women." *Freedomways*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1975).

This essay generated a discussion of myths and stereotypes as propagated on television and in films.

Daly, Frederic Y. "To Be Black, Poor, Female, and Old." *Freedomways*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1976).

This essay is a good example of the use of statistics to support a thesis. It can generate discussion of the problems of age and poverty among Black women.

Evans, Mari. "The 7:25 Trolley." In *I Am a Black Woman*. New York: Morrow, 1970.

In this poetic monologue, a woman prepares to go to work. The reading raised questions about class attitudes among women and the history of Black women working outside the home as domestics.

Grosvenor, Verta Mae. "Black Satin Amazon Fire Engine Cry Baby: Meditation on a Myth." *Village Voice* (May 28, 1979).

A personal essay that counters Bond's discussion (see above) of stereotypes. Demonstrates the use of personal experience to make a point.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Women Are the Mules of the World." In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1978.

This dialogue between the novel's heroine and her grandmother raises the issues of generational expectations, Black female roles, etc.

Jong, Erica. "Women Enough." *Women's Day* (April 3, 1979).

A poem about writing, contrasting writing as the poet's creative outlet with the necessity for her mother and grandmother to keep house.

Jordan, June. "From the talking back of Ms. Valentine Jones. poem # one." *Ms.* (April 1978).

A good example of a speaking voice in a poem, contrasting dreams with everyday reality.

____________. "Poem about My Rights." *Essence*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (November 1978).

A poem linking violence against women with violence against oppressed peoples.

Lorde, Audre. "Tar Beach." *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 1979).

This autobiographical story raises issues of eroticism and lesbian literature.

Metzger, Diane; Holly Prado; and Susan Yankowitz. "Buzzing and Humming: The New Writing." *Chrysalis*, No. 6 (1978).

Original fiction pieces by the three writers reflect an intersection of literary forms, both poetry and prose, which the awakening of feminist consciousness has begun to generate. The poem by Yankowitz, "On Writing: Her Infinite Variety," describes the writing process as seen through this writer's perspective.

Papachistou, Judith. *Women Together: A History in Documents of the Women's Movement in the United States.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976.

The book contains short, readable pieces of the earliest militants, the women who participated in the many campaigns for women's rights before suffrage was won, and of contemporary feminist ideas during the current women's movement of the 1960's and 1970's. We used Sojourner Truth's speech "Ain't I a Woman?" from the women's rights convention of 1851, a good example of moving from the spoken word to the written word. If the workshop participants are agreeable, it may be a good idea to transcribe some of the group's vivid and creative statements so each woman can see her voice in writing.

Shange, Ntozake. "Three (for International Women's Day)." *The Black Scholar* (June 1975).

This poem introduces questions of male-female relationships and competition among women.

Shariat, Fahamisha. "Black Women Vocalists." Unpublished manuscript.

A radio script, aired March 8, 1979; an example of writing intended to be spoken. Raises questions of research, selection of factual material, and formatting information. Contains short biographical essays.

Smith, Beverly. "A Journal Entry." Unpublished manuscript.

A response to racism and sexism, contained in the author's journal. A good example of journal writing.

Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." *Ms.*, Vol. 2 (May 1974).

This essay, originally an article in *Ms.*, picks up the theme of how our mothers/grandmothers expressed their creativity and explores the legacy of Black women's creativity.

SUGGESTED BACKGROUND READING

The following collections contain usable resources for a workshop series on women and writing. I have tried to give some indication of the contents of each. I have not provided a bibliography of women writers; however, several of the collections listed contain useful bibliographies. These collections do offer a good starting point.

Bell, Roseann P., et al., eds. *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1979.

A collection of essays, interviews, stories, and poems, with photographs and drawings on various aspects of Black womanhood. Interviews with writers may be of special value.

Cade, Toni, ed. *The Black Woman: An Anthology.* New York: Signet, 1970.

Stories, poems, and essays by and about Black women.

Chin, Frank, et al., eds. *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1975.

Four of the fourteen writers represented are women, including playwright Momoko Iko. Excellent introduction to Asian writers. Biographical notes included.

Gross, Theodore L., ed. *A Nation of Nations: Ethnic Literature Writers.* New York: Free Press, 1971.

Various aspects of ethnic identity in the United States in poems, autobiography, essays, fiction, and song lyrics. Includes work by Asian American, Native American, Black, and European American writers.

Howe, Florence, and Ellen Bass, eds. *No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems by Women.* Introduction by Florence Howe. Garden City, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1973.

The poems are organized thematically, with biographical sketches of the poets.

Juhasz, Suzanne. *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women: A New Tradition.* New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

An academic study of the woman poet, with essays on Emily Dickinson, Marianne Moore, Denise Levertov, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, Alta, and Adrienne Rich. Selected bibliography.

Lerner, Gerda, ed. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History.* New York: Random House, 1973.

Primary source materials, oral transcriptions, and formal writings on various aspects of Black women's experiences. Bibliography.

Niethammer, Carolyn. *Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women.* New York: Macmillan, 1977.

Cultural and anthropological study of Native American women. Includes interviews, oral poetry and stories.

______________. *Selections from the Black.* Providence, Rhode Island: Jamestown Publishers, 1971.

A reading-skills series. Each volume contains thirty reading selections (some by women) followed by exercises to develop comprehension, vocabulary, word meaning, phonics, and study skills. Three Volumes: olive, for reading levels 6 through 8; brown, for reading levels 9 through 11; and purple, for reading levels 12 through college.

______________. *Voices from the Bottom.* Providence, Rhode Island: Jamestown Publishers, 1974.

Follows same format as *Selections from the Black.* Writings by Native Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. (In English.)

Webber, Jeannette L., and Joan Grumman, eds. *Woman as Writer.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978.

Women in the process of writing. Part One presents statements about the writing process in journals, essays, interviews, poems, and stories. Part Two contains longer examples of writings by the same women presented in Part One. Includes Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, and Alice Walker. Bibliography.

CUT ON DOTTED LINE

COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS

We would appreciate your response to the following questionnaire. If you would like to have more information about our project or the participating sites, let us know. Please tear out this self-addressed page and mail it back to us.

1. What is the name of your group? What kind of program is it?

2. How did you learn about our course materials?

3. Were our courses incorporated into other activities carried out by your program? Were they presented as a separate project?

4. Which courses did you use?

5. Was this a limited workshop series or an ongoing women's studies program?

6. Did the courses provide enough material for the group's interests and needs? Are there other kinds of resources that you would have found useful? What are they?

7. How many participants were involved in the courses? Number of women ____________. Number of men ____________. Age range ____________. Ethnic background ____________. Income range ____________.

8. How did the participants feel about the content of the courses (e.g., activities, readings)? Which of the materials did you find most useful? Least useful?

9. Other comments:

Please fold and mail

From ______________________

____

____

Please
Affix
Stamp
Here

TO: **Women's Community Studies**
Graduate Program
Goddard College
Plainfield, Vermont 05667

255